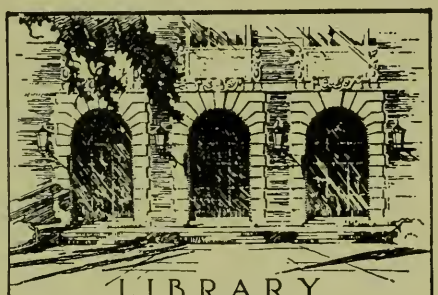
A Woman's Love-Lesson

Emily J. Dunham



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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

VOL. III.

A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON

BY

EMILY J. DUNHAM

'Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad, perplexëd minors.'

E. B. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

CHAPTER I.

Next morning little Mrs. Broughton was so much weaker that there was no question whether or not she should make another effort and get up. All she could do was to lie still, secretly hugging to her breast the fragments of Mattie's letter. She had not slept all night, she was worn out, but she was not unhappy; it was impossible for her to be that, when her loving mind pictured her Dick and his bride upon their honeymoon.

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Not knowing if they were in London, she fancied them in the country, merely because green fields and lanes were dearest to her; their surroundings were not of much importance, she knew; for there would be summer in their hearts, with sunshine bright enough to glorify into loveliness the dreariest place on God's earth.

The rector had not mentioned Richard again; the subject of the marriage was avoided by him. If he guessed that his wife's fingers were holding fragments of torn paper under her pillow, he did not attempt to take them from her.

The morning looked miserable to him when it came. He had realised at last that Doctor Wadham had spoken truth when he had said that invalids often go away to seek health and find, instead, death. He was afraid that Alice was going to die.

And foremost in his heart was a feeling of injury.

A strange doctor visited Mrs. Broughton that day; from him the rector persuaded himself to expect some hope; but this medical man, on being closely questioned, did not attempt to palliate the husband's anxiety,—on the contrary, spoke plainly, thinking that the end of the illness must have been long foreseen by anyone who loved the little woman.

'She may live some days with care,' he said; 'but only a miracle could save her now.'

The rector went away, out by the sea-shore, where only waves and rocks were witness to his sorrow; and then, bowing himself down, his face in his hands, looked his future in the eyes, and hated it. He had never expected to be left a widower,—

his wife had often disappointed him, but never more than now, when she was going away out of his life, and he could not alter her determination. He could no longer believe that if she made an effort she could obey him and stay.—Gradually, his intense pity for himself drove away the last atom of pity he had for her; he said to himself that she was going to eternal happiness, escaping the pains, toil, and grief of earthly denizenship, leaving him to fight the battle alone for many weary years perhaps. He envied her. He wished he could lay down his burden also, and receive the reward for a life which had always been consciously virtuous.

As a relief from grief he desired to be angry, and the fitting object for his anger was, of course, his son Richard.

He came to the conclusion that Richard's undutiful conduct had killed his mother.

While he was out there on the beach, away from all eyes but those of God, this man lived through much misery. Many men, knowing that he had been self-sufficient, hard, selfish, even to those he loved best, would have felt no sympathy for him in his loss, would have doubted the extent, the sincerity of his sorrow. But God, the unerring Judge, was alone with him.

This was not a man who was consciously tyrannical, but one who believed in his own wisdom as infallible. Out of the one natural fault had sprung all those others which had grown round an honest character, shutting out heavenly light from it.

To think of himself first was a habit, not an intention.

For a while sobs shook him. Then he went to the water's edge, dipped his handkerchief, and, throwing aside his hat, laved his brow and eyes. For a few minutes he had behaved as vagabonds and tramps do; but he had been quite alone, and no one had seen that he had wept in the open air, and washed in the ocean. Never before had it been necessary for him to lay aside his rigid dignity.

Before going back to his dying wife he returned to his seat on the rock and wrote a letter in pencil to his curate.

When Philip received it, he thought wonderingly that his rector had the firmest will, the strongest mind, the most admirable self-command.

For the news contained in the clearly-

written note made Hedworth tremble with emotion, brought moisture into his eyes, so that for an instant he could not distinguish one word from another. Yet in the writing was no sign that the rector had felt as keenly.

'Rodlynn, Tuesday afternoon.

'My dear Hedworth,

'You will receive this to-day, I trust, and I rely upon your aid. My dear wife is dying, can last but a few days, humanly speaking. Will you break the news to Anna? If you would go to her, and fetch her home, she would feel the shock less than if I recalled her by telegraph. We shall reach the rectory to-morrow night. My wife desires to return, and the doctor informs me that, with due care, the journey may be made.

'Relying upon your compliance and sympathy,

'I remain, my dear Hedworth,

'Yours very sincerely,

'JOHN BROUGHTON.'

'A wonderful man!' murmured the curate. 'God help him!'

Philip stood with the letter in his hand, and looked at the grey tower of the church among the limes, and at the chimneys of the rector's home, just visible above the tree-tops. From the cottage garden he could see also the road down which the Broughtons had driven not so long ago On the day of their departure he had stood by his gate and waved his hand to Anna's mother, whom he loved not only for Anna's sake, but because of the affection for prodigal Richard which he shared

with her. He remembered now the conversation he had had with her about Dick; how she had blessed him, with tearful gratitude, for 'being good' to her boy.

A great pain smote the curate's heart as he thought what Dick's grief would be. If the rector had known how completely Philip's sympathy was with Richard, he would not have appealed to him for aid. For Dick had written to his friend, announcing his marriage to 'the good woman' whose influence was to mould his life worthily. The friend had indeed heard the news before the father, for Mrs. Broughton's letter had been detained at the lodging-house a day and a half.

Still Philip knew that this was no time to limit his sympathy to thoughts. He was to be ambassador to Anna, and, with haste, could manage to reach town this

night. Anna also would be grieved. He had felt first for Dick's loss, because Dick had always been his mother's boy; but the daughter could not fail to be stricken with sorrow. Hurrying in to Grace, he told her all.

She listened in silence.

'My poor darling, I must go to her at once!' he cried, in conclusion. 'Grace, remember her in your prayers, for she will feel this terribly.'

Then Grace spoke.

'If I were you, I would not go to-night, brother.'

'Why should I delay?'

'You will probably find her out, at some ball or other.'

'I shall not reach Kensington until midnight.'

'Exactly.'

'Then I shall wait until she returns,—I can spend the night at an hotel; she will wish to leave by an early train, that she may prepare for her mother's coming.'

'Men are always headstrong,' said Grace, resignedly. 'Do as you please, brother, but don't blame me for the consequences. Anna never behaved well to her mother while she had the chance, so no doubt she will make a great fuss now. That is the way of the world.'

Philip packed a bag and set out for the station. Many people noticed the troubled expression of his face, and tried to make him stop his rapid walk to explain what ailed him; but he waved them away, pleading important business as an excuse. He had an idea that the rector would not wish all Maycross to know that little Mrs. Broughton was being brought home to die.

But one man heard the news that night, in spite of Philip's intention.

Captain Purvis saw the curate at the station, followed him down the platform, got into the same carriage of the same train.

The two men were on friendly terms: Philip had not one enemy.

'You're off to London, Mr. Hedworth?'

In this way the conversation began.

'Yes.'

'Broughton's orders, eh?'

'Yes.'

'Going to see Richard?'

'I . . . I don't know for certain. Is he still in London? If so, I will.'

'Hum,' said the captain, astonished, 'I made sure you were the instrument of parental wrath, but it seems I'm wrong. Broughton 'll have to receive my little

girl as his son's wife, and I've no doubt he'll relent towards Dick sooner or later. As he's not got another son he can't well help himself.'

'I have heard nothing of Mr. Broughton's views or intentions.'

'Yet he's sending you to town?'

'I meant to tell no one upon what errand I am going,' the curate said, doubtfully, 'yet, as circumstances have made you more than a stranger, and I have received no command to be silent, I will explain.'

'Old Broughton hates me like poison, and I return the compliment; but he won't find it easy to deny that his son's my daughter's husband.'

'Hush, don't speak harshly of a fellow-man who is in great sorrow . . . Richard's mother is dying.'

'Good Lord!' cried Purvis. 'The woman who was good to my little girl! Poor soul,—yet I don't know as she's to be pitied; she's had a life that would have soured most women. What a way Dick will be in, to be sure.'

'I am going to fetch her daughter home.'

'What, Anna, the prim young woman who's always thought herself mighty superior? the one you're engaged to? I lost some of my respect for you when I heard that; the man who'd marry the parson's daughter must be something of a fool. She's too like her father.'

'Say what you please of me, but do not speak ill of her.'

'Does the old man feel anything, do you think?'

'Surely, he is deeply attached to his wife.'

'And he's bringing her home? Dick will want to go to her. I suppose he won't be denied entrance?'

'If Richard comes he shall see his mother!'

CHAPTER II.

While Anna Broughton had been in London she had heard of intellectual affinity, and had come to believe that this was the reason of her attraction towards Basil, and his attraction towards her.

Her moral character had undergone many changes, so that some people would have called her altogether a different woman; but though nature is not as consistent as some philosophers believe, in this case the changes had been produced by the development of various tendencies,

which only an alteration of circumstance could have strengthened and made visible.

Miss Broughton, the rector's model daughter, had always felt the burden of her position; though she had imagined that no great temptation could ever assail her, she had disliked the dulness of a routine which had precluded the possibility of large excitements.

Temptations may not be desirable, but it is not to be denied that they are usually exciting.

Happy the nation which has no history! But no doubt the uneventful nations are not contented with their negative nature.

A novel had opened Anna's eyes to the part which romance plays in the world whether of town or country—had given a form to her recognised longings, and had made her turn insensibly towards the

only friends who held broad views regarding life and its possibilities.

Had Barbara and Basil Morne not come to Maycross at that time, Anna would probably have recovered from her fit of dissatisfaction, and have hardened her heart against the insidious suggestions that novel had made to her.

All her days she would have continued to decry romance, until she had learned to deceive herself into a belief in her own want of sympathy with tender fancies. Love, she would have told the young women of Maycross, was not romance, it was often reality, but never assumed entire control over a well-regulated mind. Now, in London, her own mind had ceased to be well-regulated.

The influence of those 'worldlings' had been stronger than the teachings of her

father. She had struggled at first against the conquerors, only to ultimately find intense joy in being conquered.

From considering her early life tame she had come to denouncing it as narrow. She aspired to become a grand woman, for Basil had told her that, in his opinion, she might easily be great. We are all ready to believe in the credulity of those who predict triumphs for us. No woman ever yet turned a deaf ear to the voice which told her that destiny was holding out glorious gifts to her.

In what way she was to be great Anna had not yet decided, only she thought that she would need some other mind on which to exercise her talents. The girl who is derided to-day is the girl who believes that her personal work is to produce a revolution for good; the girl who, like

Anna, determines to rule nobly by influencing the work of a man, has always, particularly in fiction, been treated with respect and consideration.

It is usually held that a man's mind is the kingdom of woman's ambition.

Anna Broughton wanted to do great things, and, partly because she honestly distrusted her own powers, partly because she was attracted by the man, she meant to use Basil's brain as her tool. It was a noble tool, it was lying idle; it would be grand to set it to work in the right way.

Women begin life with hearts filled with enthusiasm, which filters gradually out as they tread their life-path. The happy women are those who regain some of that enthusiasm, and are able to stow it away for their old age. Those are the ones who bring sunshine into dim

places, and find death only a dark archway which leads to greater brightness.

Anna's enthusiasm irradiated her personality completely at present, and she had no idea that she would ever lose any of it. Her intellectual friendship for Basil Morne was her delight, her engagement to the curate merely a detail. She thought of the detail as little as she could, because Basil did not approve of it.

Admitting to herself that she had done wrong in accepting the devotion of Philip Hedworth, she had not the least intention of being untrue to him; indeed she planned for herself a martyr's future of sweetly-endured misery, which she called Duty.

A good woman feels inspirited when a duty, sufficiently inexorable, stands before her.

Through Basil she meant to do good in the world; as Philip's wife she meant to be a model to the women of Maycross.

The incidents of her days were piled closely one upon another, and each incident was a new experience. Perhaps, if the new experiences of human beings were limited to one a day, there would be fewer broken hearts. We thinking creatures require to let our thoughts play a long while upon a given subject before we comprehend it in all its bearings, and are competent to form a judgment as to its value. For lack of time for thinking, very small things get reckoned as worth a king's ransom.

Anna met every day with her mind in a chaos, and became ruled by her impulses for want of time to manufacture reflections. When she saw new sights and heard new

sounds she had always Basil to turn to as a guide, philosopher, and friend. He was part of her life now; and this was the life she loved, for which she had yearned passionately.

Barbara's suggestion that she should jilt the curate, Anna dared not consider; yet the words had been spoken, had left writing upon the wall. That the thing had been suggested robbed it of impossibility. It was not impossible—but she would not think about it.

Basil took her to the picture-galleries, and talked art; to the theatres, and criticised the acting; to the Park, and introduced his friends to her; to the churches to hear popular preachers; and she came away feeling that all these entertainments were very much alike.

Above all, he asked her to go often to

the 'Ladies' Gallery' when he spoke in any debate. Anna enjoyed these political jaunts more than any of the others. Basil was more eloquent than any other man, and his opinions were invariably the best possible! She felt that the friendship of such a zealous patriot was an honour indeed.

No wonder that Anna had developed!

She did not understand London society, for that requires the study of many life-times, but she heard conversations which touched the highest and the lowest points of existence in a minute; which not only played round precipices, but went down and dragged something strange from their utmost depths; which soared upwards, apparently on familiar visiting-terms with Heaven.

One day she rode before breakfast,

shopped all the rest of the morning with Bab, paid calls all the afternoon, went to the House and took tea on the terrace, visited a theatre, and looked in at a ball.

While she was at the ball Philip Hedworth arrived at No. 13, Sandhurst Street.

Anna did not dance: Basil had advised her not to do so; he never danced himself. At her first ball Anna had been excited, now she was elated, happy, but still dignified. The men who hovered round her were attracted by her beauty and her refusal to dance.

Basil never suffered a pang of jealousy. Anna was susceptible to his compliments alone; other men she studied, some she liked, many she condemned; for none had she the humble regard she had for her friend's brother. Sometimes he wondered what she would say when he told her of

his love, but he never had a depressed moment. He was with her constantly, and could watch the growth of her dependence on his company. Intellectual affinities are privileged.

Coming home in a hired carriage from that ball, Anna remembered that the new day, just two hours old, was the birthday of her brother Dick. Under the shadow of this recollection, which revived home-associations, she sat silent: and Basil—unseen by Barbara, who was leaning back with her eyes shut—pressed Anna's hand.

'You are tired?'

'Yes.'

'You are sad?'

'Yes.'

'To-morrow you must tell me about it.'

She did not refuse.

Little Miss Hilda opened the door as

soon as Basil had knocked; she wreathed her arms about Anna's neck directly the girl had entered.

'My poor dear love, my heart bleeds for you!—your darling mother is not so well, and a charming gentleman,—you know who!—has come to fetch you to her.'

Anna drew herself out of the embrace. Standing in the narrow passage she looked around her; there was a startled misery in her eyes that had not been brought there solely by the bad news of her mother.

Barbara ran forward.

'What a shame to come troubling her now!'

Basil laid his hand on Anna's arm.

'You must not let yourself be troubled. No doubt it is some unnecessary scare, and you will soon be able to come back to us.'

He had divined the nature of her dismay, and she, instead of being ashamed, was grateful to him.

In the honesty of the tearful glance she turned upon him she was very beautiful he thought.

Poor Anna!—She was one of the many women who mean to be always good and true!—There is always some great excuse for them when they fail, and when they succeed they are earth's heroines.

Very human was her fault now. There is terrible strength in unrecognised love, for, being secret from the soul, it cannot be fought against.

In that second of mutual understanding, the love of Basil for Anna, and of Anna for Basil, stood revealed.

It shone in their faces, it echoed in the tones of their voices. From the room on

the left of the hall Philip Hedworth stepped into the circle of light.

He saw that Anna was changed.

Basil, obeying an unknown impulse of chivalry, bowed and withdrew into the shadow, leaving Anna to be greeted by the curate.

By this time Philip had put his own concern aside, and was full of sorrowful sympathy for her's.

Little Miss Hilda spoke.

'This gentleman will take you home early in the morning, dear love. You will be in plenty of time, for your mother has not reached the rectory yet.'

'Is there really danger? I thought she was getting better?'

Barbara did not go away. She could not repress her desire to be participator in the small scene being enacted. Without

saying to herself that a novelist gains power by watching emotional occurrences, she acted upon the knowledge.

Also she was curious to see how Anna would behave to her lover.

Philip's face was full of pity for the woman he loved.

'It is sad news I bring, dear. I would to God it were less sad.'

'*Philip!* . . . . She is not *dead*?'

'No, no; you will see her again,—she will speak to you. . . . . The parting will not be so terribly sudden.'

'But there is no hope?'

He put her father's letter into her hands.

As she read it she realised that neither she nor her father had done all that had been possible to make happy the life which was measured. To her heart of hearts the

grief went—to her soul which was more noble than she or any other person knew.

'Oh, poor Dick!' she cried. 'And it is his birthday! Where is he? Can't you find him? It is most important that he should go to her—she loves him best—he is more to her than I have ever been.'

'Richard is married to Mattie Purvis.'

For a moment this intelligence made her mind reel. Hot colour, born of outraged pride, flooded her neck, cheeks, and brow. She saw Mattie's impertinently pretty face as it must be, lit up with triumph because she was the wife of a gentleman; and she understood, all in the same minute, the opinion which her own father would hold as to Mattie's duplicity and scheming.

The moment passed; and, as her colour faded again, she forgot that Mattie had ever been considered her own inferior, and

remembered that she was a woman. Women's hearts speak for one another, though they do not always listen to them. In the great union of womanhood there should be no ranks, no classes.

Anna drew a deep breath, and became conscious that she no longer blamed Dick's wife.

'Richard married . . . and to Mattie! . . . Then they really loved each other . . . I did not understand that. Philip, my father must be very angry, is he not? Will he try to keep Dick away from mother?'

'I trust not; displeasure cannot separate mother and son. Richard has heard of Mrs. Broughton's illness by this time, and will be preparing to go to her.'

'Poor Dick!' said the girl again.

It was a tacit admission that Dick, who had always been true to his mother even

when his conduct had been most wrong, had the right to be pitied more than she, Anna, who had been dutiful but not loving.

Hedworth, desiring to spare her all trouble that could be avoided, began to make arrangements.

'You must go now and take some rest. There is a train for Maycross leaves King's Cross at nine o'clock to-morrrow, and another at half-past ten.'

'Let us go early,' said Anna; 'there will be many preparations to make.'

'Then I will call for you at half-past eight.'

'Are you going to an hotel?'

'Yes.'

Basil came forward.

'Can you not stay the night here, Mr. Hedworth?'

'Pray do, dear sir,' added Miss Hilda cordially. 'My mother would be pained, I am sure, by your departure.'

The curate glanced at the faces round him. He was not clever at reading expressions, and was of an unsuspicious nature; he believed in the kindness of these people, but he refused Mr. Morne's invitation.

'I have taken my room, thank you,' he answered. 'I should be obliged to go back for my bag, and returning late I should disturb you. It was exceedingly kind of you to offer.'

'Good-night, Philip,' Anna said, giving him her hand. Basil, judging by the simplicity of the curate's manner, expected to see him kiss his betrothed.

The expectation was a foolish one. Philip would not have made a parade of

the privileged position he held as Anna's accepted lover; and to-night, not only had a sorrow come to forbid enjoyment, but an indefinable change in the girl was sufficiently obvious to have made him hesitate in any case.

Being human, Philip could not help remembering that he had received no letter from Anna for a week.

'Good-night, try to rest,' he said.

For a moment he held her hand, then turned to pay his farewells to her friends.

His sincere gray eyes rested on Basil Morne's face longer than upon any other.

CHAPTER III.

As the two men studied each other they knew that they were more than strangers, that the currents of their lives crossed, that they could not escape much mutual influence.

There was scarcely jealousy between them, or else it was jealousy of a strange subtle kind which neither recognised as the great passion.

Philip's heart grew heavy; Basil pitied him.

When the curate had gone, Barbara

tried effusively to console her dear Anna.

'You poor dear, persecuted darling! to be met with such dreadful news, brought by that horrid man, after such a delightful evening! My dear, that curate will always bring you misery.'

'Bab, he could not help it.'

'Bah, there is such a thing as fate!' cried Barbara.

'You must not ask Anna to face anything like a serious problem to-night,' Basil said, as he came forward out of the shadow. 'She has trouble enough, without going to meet others which will force themselves into notice some day.'

Anna looked up at him with the implicit confidence she felt.

'It is so terrible to feel remorseful!' she explained. 'I don't know now how it was,

but I always agreed with my father in everything, and we thought mother affected, weak-minded, not a little childish. Even when we were gentlest with her, it was patronisingly, as people are gentle to children who are troublesome. If I had only known that we were going to lose her so soon . . . oh, . . . I would have cared for her as . . . as Dick did! This makes me wretched now. . . Mr. Morne, *you* understand, I am sure; Bab, don't you?'

'Yes, we both do,' he said, soothingly. 'When anyone dies those who are left to live can always find some reason for self-reproach; that is part of the shadow of the grave.'

'You weren't to blame a bit, darling; you had learned to follow your father's lead in all things, and he set you an example of severity. He has made his only

son defy him, and his only daughter he has nearly made wretched. You must shake off the influence of the old life, my poor Anna; you must come back to us as soon as you possibly can, and we will show you a different, a free world. Basil, it's no use for you to shake your head at me. I know that she can't listen to arguments now, but when she's alone in that horrid village she will remember them, and they will bear fruit.'

When Anna met the curate next morning her eyes were tired with weeping, but her bearing was quite calm.

He had no occasion to think for her.

They travelled down to Maycross by that early train, meeting no one they knew.

In the village the trouble had by this time become known.

The housekeeper was hurrying towards

the station. She was carrying a telegram which had come for Anna.

It was from the rector, bidding his daughter come to Rodlynn with all speed, if she desired to see her mother alive. During the night little Mrs. Broughton had become so much worse that her removal to Maycross was out of the question.

'Mr. Richard came down by the coach early this morning, miss,' said the housekeeper, 'and as soon as I read him the telegram that was sent me, which said that the poor dear mistress was too bad to travel, he set off for Rodlynn at once.'

Anna, who was very pale, turned to Philip.

'I must go on. There is no need for you to come.'

The curate bent his head in assent.

He did think that Anna made no allowance for his own feeling for the little woman whose firm friend he had been, that she was putting him aside as one who had no concern with the family. The rector's wife would have been his mother-in-law,—he would have had, indeed he already had, all a son's love for her. His affection for Dick had given him insight into her heart.

But he was not the man to insist upon his rights. He would not intrude upon his rector's grief.

'It is true,' he said, 'that the parish may need me. Anna, will you give her my love?'

'Yes,' she answered, quickly, without thinking.

'Be good to Richard,—the poor boy will be very unhappy. If you can persuade

him to come to me . . . afterwards . . . I will try my best to comfort him; that will be working for her.'

'Philip, were you really so fond of mother, then?'

'We had one great sympathy.'

They had reached the station; the train rushed up to the platform, the curate helped the girl into a carriage;—with a widower's, a father's thoughtfulness, bought sandwiches for her because the journey was a long one.

She smiled and thanked him. But still she did not realise that tears were in his eyes, that his voice was hoarse as he said,

'God be with you.'

And when she reached the sea-side lodgings, it was to find that she was only just in time.

The awed face of the little servant who opened the door, the sobbing landlady who was seated on the stairs, these unfamiliar sights showed her that this was one of those hours which strangers share, a time of overwhelming sorrow.

'She's sinking fast, poor soul.'

Mrs. Broughton had not left the parlour.

The rector opened the door for his daughter, but there was no salutation exchanged.

From the bed a feeble voice sounded, making a kind of low song, which was at one moment a hymn-tune, at another a nursery-rhyme. It was very sweet and musical, suggesting the singing of distant angel-choirs,—for the foolish words did not sound foolish to the two men who heard them.

Richard was seated by the pillow, and

his arm was under his mother's shoulders, her head lay on his breast. As Anna stole up to him he smiled at her, but spoke to the dying woman.

'Yes, Mamsey, you always sang that so well. Do you remember how it was my treat, my reward, when I'd been good? Now, we're both older, you see,—but I'm your boy just the same,—and my wife is your daughter, dear,—spare a thought for Mattie!'

If the rector understood the whisper he took no notice. At the foot of the couch he stood, wine-glass in hand, waiting until the hour struck to give his wife the medicine which would keep her alive a little longer.—All his life he had never failed in his duty towards her. This was almost the last duty she would require from him.

His tall figure cast a shadow on the

coverlet, for his back was to the sun, and his face looked very grey and cold.

Dick had been leading the wandering mind back to to-day, out of the golden mists of the long ago.

Little Mrs. Broughton laughed suddenly, startling Anna and the rector.

'Oh, yes, Dick . . . you are a married man! The first of my children to get married, and I couldn't go to your wedding. Give dear Mattie my love, my fond, fond love . . . It is morning still, isn't it?'

'Yes, dear; a beautiful morning. Here is Anna,—she has come to you.'

Anna kissed her mother's cheek.

'My good girl,—you were always good, dear, even as a baby.'

'It is time for you to take your medicine, Alice.'

She let him give it to her, and lifted a thin hand to press his.

'Don't worry about me, John dear . . . I . . . I'm very happy. I *do* think . . . I hope it isn't wrong . . . that I am going to heaven.'

'It is right to have trust in His love.'

'John, in case I can't speak presently, I . . . I should like to thank you . . . for always having been so good to me.'

And if the rector did not sob it was by reason of his iron will.

Not until evening did the little woman leave her family. When the last came,—she had been unconscious for several hours,—she could not speak, but the smile on her face was so much like a child's rejoicing, that her husband forgot to tremble for her, ceased to think of death as an awful experience for such a

frail creature. Before he guessed that she was dying, the smile had become fixed, and Dick had fallen on his knee with a groan, and buried his face in the bed-clothes.

Anna looked at her father; their eyes met. Side by side they knelt in silent prayer; but their sorrow was much less than that of the son who had lost more than they understood, yet had gained something that they had not. His mother was dead, but her spirit would speak to him for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

A GRAVE was dug, in a shadowed part of Maycross church-yard, close to the north wall of the church. The shadow was cast by lime-branches, and so long as foliage time endured, from Spring to Autumn, when the sun shone, that place was never without movement. The shade and light danced over it; so it would be when white marble and hot-house flowers marked the spot of earth beneath which lay little Mrs. Broughton.

Birds were always busy, too, in those lime-boughs, swinging on the branches,

serenading each other, calling to their young, chasing the flies and butterflies. The air was sweet once a year with the scent of the lime flower. It was a pleasant place altogether.

Mrs. Broughton had chosen it before she died.

'We will lie there side-by-side, John,' she had said; and the rector, though he cared little for the birds, flowers, and sunshine which would exist on earth when he had ceased to inhabit it, had yielded to a request, the poetry of which had not appealed to him.

He was a lover of nature; he knew flowers botanically, and could tell a great deal about the habits of insects; but his wife had treated flowers, and all living creatures as well, as tenderly as she had treated human beings. Birds she had

cared for best; and many robins, chaffinches, thrushes, blackbirds, and sparrows would have reason to mourn for her.

The old men who dug the grave dropped no tears into it. She had lived her life apart, only women and girls had come into her sphere of influence, and very few of these. Her invalidism had imprisoned her within the rectory walls for many years.

To pity her had seldom occurred to anyone, and she had never pitied herself.

The rector and Anna had returned to Maycross: Richard had gone back to his bride.

After his mother's death Dick had secured the old-fashioned ring, the prayer-book, the gold watch she had left him by word of mouth. No will had the little woman made, having been content to ask

that the remainder of her possessions should be divided as keepsakes among her few friends. In her boy's ear she had whispered that he was to give the ring to Mattie, with her dear love. The young married pair would benefit from having a sweet memory in common.

Maycross people saw that the rector looked pale, stern, and older; and they said to one another 'that he was bearing up wonderfully.' Speculations were rife as to the extent of his sorrow; the general opinion being that he felt sincere grief, as he had never yet been known to depart one hair's breadth from his duty. As a good, devoted husband, he would, of course, mourn his wife.

Anna also came in for her share of public attention and criticism. She was changed since her visit to London, changed

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in a hundred small ways, which country intellects could not catalogue, but which produced the effect of alienating sympathy from her.

'She's grown quite a fashionable young lady,' said Kate Ruggles to her mother. 'I don't know *how* she's different, but she's not our Miss Anna at all.'

It was decided that Anna was not particularly unhappy. She did not know herself how much she had been moved by her mother's death. The necessities of her position, of the publicity of her loss, obliged her to make all those outward manifestations of sorrow which neighbours expect from the bereaved; there was a sadness in the atmosphere of home, which proceeded from all the signs and symbols of woe, as well as from the natural sadness of loss. When she thought that she would

never see her mother again she felt resigned. There had been no time in her life when she could not have said good-bye to her mother for an indefinite period, without feeling the least desire to cry. As a child she had been 'father's baby,' as a girl 'father's companion,' as a woman her father's assistant.

Now she was surprised to find that he had lost all the virtues, nobilities, greatness, with which she had credited him. Hero-worship has a sad way of coming to an abrupt end. He was as good as he had ever been, he was honestly admirable in many ways; but his daughter, with a girl's impetuosity, having seen one fault in him, dethroned him at once from the high place he had occupied in her reverence.

Men are worth reverencing because

they are good though faulty, but women are apt to see at once the weak place in a character, and view this so persistently that all the fine points are out of focus. If Eve had seen one small speck in the apple in the garden of Eden, it is probable that she would have disdained the wiles of the tempter.

Richard had gone away at once after his mother's death, and the rector had forbidden him to return home for the funeral. Anna had taken her brother's part, greatly to his surprise; and by so doing had offended her father. When the morning for the funeral arrived Anna sought out the rector, and continued her opposition to his will.

It was in the little library that the interview took place, where many associations suggested Dick's early and late

delinquencies. In this room he had come to be birched; here he had expressed his desire to 'go to the devil his own way if he went at all;' here his last defiance had been hurled.

The rector thought of all this when he saw his daughter standing before him on the very patch of carpet-pattern where Dick had stamped. Anna had learned to hold her own in argument, when her excitement did not master her. Excited she had seldom been before she had made the acquaintance of worldly friends, and gone to the great city of London.

Those subtle changes which had come to his daughter displeased the rector. He had once been able to pride himself upon the resemblance which her moral nature had borne to his own; now she seemed to have outgrown his influence.

All teachers feel some dismay when they find that their pupils are more learned than they.

'Father, I have come to ask you what I am to do about Richard?'

'*Do*, my dear, there is no occasion to do anything that I can see.'

'He will come to-day; we shall see him in the churchyard. I cannot bear to carry animosity to the verge of dear mother's grave; I will not refuse to speak to him, or to his wife, if she comes.'

The rector's face grew dark.

'Think, father, how the people will stare, and point, and talk! If we *are* vexed with him for marrying beneath him can we not hide our vexation from the world? There will be so many friends present, and so many strangers.'

'All the more reason why we should not

countenance . . . the successful scheme of Purvis's daughter.'

'She was always a good girl. At first I did not like the idea of Dick's marrying her, I would have done all I could to have helped you to prevent it, but, now that it is a fact, we can gain nothing by refusing to recognise her position. If Richard had not married her, and there had been a scandal, you would indeed have had reason for being severe to him: but she is your daughter-in-law, you cannot deny that.'

The rector studied his daughter's face. A little while ago Anna would not have spoken in this tone of worldly wisdom. He was not used to girls who dared talk, even simply, of shocking subjects.

'And what if I forbid you to speak to the young woman?'

Anna thought for a moment.

'I shall explain that to Dick, and he will tell her that I am sorry for it.'

'London gaieties have spoiled you, Anna.'

'No, father, but I have learned that I was very narrow-minded before I gained experience. Dick and Mattie loved one another too well to let prejudices separate them, and I cannot help thinking that they were right!'

'I say that they were wrong!' The rector's hand fell heavily on his desk. 'The woman schemed, and Richard disobeyed me.'

Anna sighed.

'It is better not to command unless you can count upon obedience, father.'

'I have done with Richard. He shall never bring his wife down here, to this

house, the windows of which look out over the Green where her father insulted me before his Socialist rabble.'

Anna rose.

'Well, I am sorry—that is all I can say. And I think you will change your mind someday. It is awkward for you that your curate is Richard's friend.'

'Ah! I suppose Hedworth has been persuading you to forgive your brother!'

'Oh, no. You think I am very easily persuaded, father!'

'I should like to ask you a plain question, Anna.'

She paused by the table—she was going out of the room—and looked him steadily in the face. She was not quite afraid of the question, nor quite unprepared for it; yet she would have tried to avoid it if she

had seen how to do so, more because she dreaded its moral effect, than because she feared to answer it.

It came in an easier form than she had expected.

'Have you and Hedworth quarrelled? You have not been engaged to him two months.'

'It would be difficult to quarrel with anyone so meek. He would be so sure that it was he who was in the wrong that he would apologise immediately.'

'This is no laughing matter, Anna, and I wish you would not smile in that provoking way. Have I not had trouble enough that you should add to it?'

Anna had smiled contemptuously, but she became grave again at his request.

'We shall not quarrel, father. I know

that I have made a mistake, I do not love him well enough to have promised to marry him, but I shall not jilt him.'

The rector threw up his hands with a gesture of dismay.

'I shall not jilt him,' Anna repeated, 'because that would make a scandal.'

'One scandal is more than enough in a family. Good Heavens, what have I done that my children should bring disgrace on me? You got engaged to Hedworth by your own wish, and you must abide by the arrangement. A girl can't play fast-and-loose with a man without giving people reason to blame her. To-day, by your poor mother's grave, you had better resolve to do your duty in this world without looking for earthly rewards, child.'

Anna had said to herself, 'I will not

jilt him, I will do my duty,' often enough during the past few weeks, and had always enjoyed a martyr's satisfaction in the sacrifice of self, but when she heard almost the same words come as a command from her father's lips, she began to rebel inwardly against the notion that duty can demand the ruin of a woman's life.

We none of us, unless we are basking in prosperity, care to hear that earthly reward is unworthy of our regard.

That was a strange morning; a time for sadness, while only the shadow, not the substance, of grief seemed to be present in the rectory.

The rector murmured, 'Poor Alice . . . my dear wife,' to himself, now and again; Anna thought tenderly of 'my poor mother,' but they had not learned yet to miss her. Bereavement is thrust into the background

of death's neighbourhood, by the excitement of paying, by ceremonials and courtesies, the last honours to the dead.

The funeral of the rector's wife was a great event for Maycross.

Anna was right; Richard and Mattie both came, and she spoke to them in whispers, and pressed their hands. The rector kept his eyes upon the ground, pretending not to see the faces of the crowd, isolating himself in the privileged land of sorrow. He did not read the service himself, his Bishop was present. All the time of the ceremony a robin sang from the head of a near tomb-stone, and the sunshine played among the branches of the lime-trees.

Nature had done its best to pay respect to the little dead woman in the way she would have most appreciated, but the people who had gathered round her grave

had not everyone the kindest intentions. Purvis was there, with a conspicuous hat-band, desirous of marking his connection with the family—old Mrs. Drinkwater had come to anger the 'parson:'—it was strange to see that crowd, and to reflect that Mrs. Broughton living had been of scarcely any consequence to anyone outside her own home.

CHAPTER V.

When the people had dispersed, the rector and Anna accompanied the Bishop to the rectory, while Richard and Mattie stayed awhile by the grave. White flowers sent a beautiful odour into the air.

As Anna walked beside her father, a man and a girl who had detached themselves from the crowd, came forward and spoke to her. She looked up quickly, having been unconscious of their presence until that moment.

They were the Mornes.

'Oh . . . how kind, how good of you to come!'

Her eyes swam with tears for the first time that day.

Basil held her arm,—Barbara kissed her.

'Poor darling, we won't try to tell you all we feel for you.'

'You can't mind so very much,—I mean that death can't have much bitterness,' said the man, 'as you believe that she has gone to heaven.'

'But, I told you,' cried Anna, brokenly . . . 'I . . . I wasn't as fond of her as I might have been.'

She looked from Basil to Barbara, from Barbara back to Basil, longing for their sympathy. There was not one corner of her heart she desired to hide from them;

no doubt as to their perfect kindness towards herself had ever interfered with the rapid progress of her love for them.

Down the path in the distance, where it crossed the Green which had been made historic by the work of the rector's foe, walked the rector and his Bishop. Children were following the two men, feeling great respect for the higher dignitary, and manifesting intense interest in the details of his costume.

It was one of those times, constantly occurring in most experiences, when a large sorrow is forced to give precedence to small commonplace necessities. The rector's wife had just been laid away in the grave-yard, but he, chief-mourner though he was, could not neglect the courtesies due to his spiritual superior. Anna had just laid flowers on her mother's

coffin, but, though she was still under the influence of the emotional ceremony, she was already swayed by other impulses of affection. Instead of remembering how wide had been the difference between her mother's love and that of Barbara, she was only desirous of pouring out her sorrow to someone who could sympathise.

Circumstances had brought this about, that she ranked Barbara as her best confidante.—Her mother had passed away before she had learned to appreciate her, her father had disappointed her because her belief in him had been too ardent a hero-worship,—Philip, occupying the position of the man to whom she was engaged, had lost the position of friend,—she had no one else, but Barbara.

Anna stretched out her hand and clasped Barbara's, half leaned upon the

arm of the smaller girl. She herself was pale and trembling; the last remnant of her dignity as 'Miss Broughton' had fallen from her.

'I can't help blaming myself!' she cried, speaking to Bab, but looking at Basil. 'I was not as fond of her as I ought to have been . . . as I should be now!'

Basil, the man with the face of strength, who had been watching the distant path where the rector and the Bishop were walking, suddenly turned the keen gaze of his pale blue eyes upon Anna. Without blushing she bore the scrutiny.

'Love,' he said, 'is not a virtue that can be made: it is a passion which has to be obeyed.'

'She . . . was so good, so gentle.'

'You are condemning yourself unjustly; but we understand, Bab and I. You must

try to realise that your mother was one of the most pitiable of all creatures while she lived; that she may,—who can tell?—be already happier than she ever was before. Poor soul! I remember your telling me that she was a constant invalid. What a curse her life must have been to her!'

He shuddered, with a strong man's loathing for weakness. Barbara clasped the arm of Anna's black dress.

'You poor darling, this is the first real trouble you have ever known, and we can't do much to help you over it.'

'Oh, you can . . . you have!' said Anna, looking with grateful eyes at this brother and sister. 'I mustn't stay talking to you, or people who do not understand will blame me: but I felt when I

saw you here that I was not alone after all. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, dear girl; we shall not forget you.'

'Good-bye, Anna.'

'Old boy,' said Barbara, in a whisper, as Anna walked away, the sunshine casting a long shadow behind her tall, black figure, 'you were right; it was better for us to come. I was afraid she would regard us as strangers, as we scarcely knew the poor little woman; but you knew best, as usual.'

'Of course,' he answered, not without impatience, 'haven't I studied her?'

'And the study has ended . . . in . . . love.'

He laughed, and drew her away out of the churchyard.

'In a loss of prudence! Graves make me think of Nelly. Luckily *she* taught me ambition, so I'm never likely to be bored with life again.'

'I've plotted and planned to make you love Anna, so I've only myself to blame for my own life being spoilt. What shall I do without you, I should like to know?'

'Find a husband.'

'The search is tiring. I believe you're the only thoroughly lovable man living, and you are getting selfish.'

'What about Hambleton?'

'No doubt he's a humbug like all the others. Now, what are we going to do? Shall we stay in this lively village, or go back to town?'

'Stay,' he answered, curtly.

Barbara glanced at his determined face, and shrugged her shoulders resignedly.

Anna found the day long. After the Bishop had gone, her father shut himself into the library, and the house was so still that she, from her bed-room, could hear Jane, her mother's maid, sobbing below stairs. Meals were served at odd times, no bells rang; the tradespeople who came to the back-door spoke in whispers.

Between meals, which she took alone, Anna sat in her own room by the open window, looking out over the village. This was her home, but she felt as a returned traveller feels who comes back to a place which was once familiar, and finds that the remembrance he has borne of it for years has been false in most ways. Changes are natural, but when the past is destroyed, when memory is proved deceitful, there comes a sense of desolation.

All Anna's childhood and girlhood had

been lived under a delusion; looking backwards she saw this. She had never understood her mother, had thought her a poor, weak-spirited invalid; now she knew that little Mrs. Broughton had been weak in health only, and had never shown poverty of virtue. A little, sweet-tempered, patient, loving saint had lived under the rectory roof, and no one but Dick had appreciated her.

When Anna thought of this, the tears thronged into her eyes until she could see only a blurred landscape through the open window. How had she been enlightened as to her mother's real character? Partly by the invariable influence of death, that influence which over-writes with praise the record of a dead one's faults; partly because little Mrs. Broughton had left behind her a diary of her last week of

life. This she had scribbled in pencil, with great difficulty, and enclosed in a big envelope, on which was written,

'For my dear husband; and Anna may read it too.'

It had contained no secrets; it was a kind of letter, written in bits as she had strength, but it had explained her soul. She told her husband and daughter that she had often felt that they were very good to her, but that she disappointed them. 'I have never been able to do anything useful but pray for people, especially for you, my dears, for Richie, for Mattie, for everyone. It has sometimes made me unhappy to think that I've never been of much good, but I have begged God to let the fact that I have suffered so much keep suffering from you.'

Mrs. Broughton's last message had been

consistent with her life; she had not even hinted that her husband and daughter had ever disappointed *her*; but Anna read between the lines, and wondered that her father could not do so too.

But he could not. He was too old to be easily influenced. He sat in his library grieving for himself, that he had lost his dear wife,—not that he had lost for ever the opportunity of making up to her for his lack of understanding and of tenderness.

The long afternoon gave place at last to a gray, sad-looking evening which seemed to get no darker. As the hours struck Anna watched the sky, because she longed for darkness, when she would be able to steal out of the desolate house to the churchyard, which she thought less desolate.

When the village was beginning its

holiday-time,—when the inns and cottages were lit up, and the people were enjoying the short respite from daily work,—the rector's daughter went out, across the Green, through the little lattice gate, round the old gray church, to the corner where there was least light, under the lime boughs, to her mother's newly-made grave.

She was more at peace now, though there was in her heart an unutterable longing for someone who would understand, not only this sorrow, but all others.

She knelt by the fragrant flowers, on the trampled turf, and covering her eyes with her hands, sobbed.

Before she had been there long enough to think of the future, her hands were drawn down by hands that were stronger, and she rose, with a cry of surprise, to

find herself in the arms of Basil Morne.

'You? . . . Oh, why have you come here?'

His pale eyes were full of the light of resolution, passionately eager—his dark face was so close to her own that she could feel his breath upon her lips.

'I've come to comfort you. No one else can do it.'

She tried to draw herself out of those supporting arms, but they would not let her go.

'Father told me I was to come to her grave to make up my mind to do my duty! Oh, you must not tempt me now, when I am weak with misery . . . Be generous . . . go away . . . I must think of Philip . . . I can't jilt him . . . There must not be two scandals.'

It was the expiring effort of the father's

influence in Anna's nature. Even while she spoke his words, she knew that she had no longer the least faith in his argument.

And Basil, with the audacity of a conqueror, laughed.

'Child, you love me—to be my wife, my happiness, is your duty. I was unhappy till I found you. You shall do good to me first, then to all the world—your sweet prejudices and ambitions shall lead me. You cannot ruin *my* life, though you are willing to ruin your own!'

He let her go now, and she stood erect before him, searching his face with a gaze of mingled docility, which was childish, and effort, which was a woman's opposition to the strongest of all temptations.

'But there is another life to be thought of,—Philip's.'

Her voice, clear, tremulous, told how much she longed to yield.

'Philip knows,' said Basil. 'I have told him. He gives you back your promise, if you wish for it. You do, Anna.'

'Yes,' she answered. 'I did not know I loved you,—not until now; but I knew I had no love for him.'

CHAPTER VI.

In Miss Hilda's drawing-room Anna and Barbara were sitting with their arms entwined. Miss Broughton had returned to Sandhurst Street earlier in the day.

It was April, and sunshine and shower alternated out of doors.

Barbara was inky. Down the side of her right hand ran a long black streak, while the middle finger of her left hand was likewise defiled.

Composition exacted from her many sacrifices, which included personal clean-

liness and order. She could not compose, she said, if she thought about such trifling matters as the care of ink; and a negligent style of dress, which permitted her to sit crouched-up regardless of creases, an absence of hair-pins to worry her head, were necessary to her during hours of 'inspiration.' Before Anna's arrival she had been working feverishly at a new story, which was to be of an entirely novel kind; not cynical, not pessimistic, not in any way bad; a successor to that much-derided tale, 'Janet Wilbraham's Sacrifice.' She had kept to her original purpose, for the book which was to be the test of Lynn Hambleton's sincerity was launched upon its prosperous career, and now, with loathing for that production spurring her on to produce something he would be able to admire, she was eagerly trying to be moral,

interesting, and clever. Only a writer knows the difficulty experienced by the attempted reconciliation of these three qualities.

Poor Barbara!—There were very few moments in her life when she utterly disbelieved in her own talents, but these moments were as severe as they were scarce. To-day she had seen success, fame, and fortune lying as so many dead ashes at her feet. What were they to her? The next breath of public opinion might scatter them and she would not care. Instead of desiring worldly fame she longed for the smallest gift of any ill-paid scribbler who could write stories harmless and stories religious.

While she talked with Anna,—this was their first meeting since little Mrs. Broughton's funeral,—she tried honestly to forget herself and her own cares; but her mind,

not being used to repression, wandered now and again to the consideration of a possible plot and the difficulties of character delineation without sarcasm,—also to Lynn Hambleton, and his probable admiration for the, as yet unborn, work

'My darling girl, you mustn't worry yourself one bit!' she was saying. 'Bother the curate! If he is as good as you think him there's not the least occasion to pity him. Good people revel in sacrifices. I suppose their goodness wouldn't last if it wasn't fed up now and then with a little tonic martyrdom.'

Anna laid her cheek against Barbara's; the two faces thus juxtaposed showed great difference of expression.

Anna had gained a new dignity in place of that conscious kind which she had lost; the dignity of a woman who had seen below

the surface of emotion, and had learned both to sympathise and to love. Solitude had helped to strengthen her character, for she had been all autumn and winter away from home, staying with an aunt in a manufacturing town, where her loneliness had been intensified by the obligations of petty provincial society. Her heart and brain had developed. She had realised that of pettiness are many lives composed, some voluntarily, others perforce; she had looked upon her own life from the heights of new understanding, and had seen that she herself had viewed pettily the little world of Maycross.

Now she was separated from old associations she saw how she might have ennobled and made use of them. Her country neighbours she had despised unknowingly, but pure aspirations and intentions had no

doubt been hidden behind their every-day cares and trivial interests; she, the rector's daughter, had considered them as sheep belonging to her father's fold, only fit for driving, not as creatures whose souls were on a level with her own. Now she knew that she had missed opportunities which might never return to her. She could have lived herself in all those lives of which she had seen but the commonplace exterior. Instead, she had been but a name to them, a symbol of unsympathetic authority. A mere girl, who had never been tempted or tried, she had dared to judge the faults of other girls who were infinitely wiser; her freedom from temptation she had viewed as a superiority, instead of seeing in it a cause for humble gratitude.

On all subjects, religiously sacred, or sacred by the religion of love and pure in-

tention, she had lectured, harangued, scolded, judged, condemned, and advised, not girls only, but the women who had curtsied to her as she had passed their cottage doors, the old men who had come within sight of life's last mystery; the mothers, the wives, as well as the children.

She could blush for herself now! The old dignity which had fallen from her had been but a sham, and the new dignity which was growing within her heart was weak as yet. Still it had changed her face, had set within her eyes that soul-light which is the beauty which the ugliest of God's creatures may possess, which may be kindled only by the fire of pure love. The light of passion's fire is more brilliant, but less enduring; this other light strengthens as the body fades.

Barbara's cheek felt hot to Anna's face.

'Dear Bab!' she said caressingly. 'I know you mean to encourage me by your rather wild words, you have always been so good to me!'

'I want you to leave off worrying about your curate.'

'He is a . . . noble man. It would be wrong if I did not worry about him. Sometimes I wonder how I can have treated him so badly; but then I remember Basil, I could not help loving Basil—it seemed to be an obligation.'

'Eh, bien?' cried Bab. 'You can't regret it?'

'No, dear, no. When one loves, one knows that love is ordained by God; until one does, one thinks that it is a matter of will.'

'Oh, you are getting too lofty-minded for my poor comprehension! Love's an un-

deniably earthly thing, my dear, for all the idealising that has been bestowed upon it. You don't suppose, do you, that Basil's affection is . . . a matter of duty?'

Anna coloured beneath the gaze of Barbara's sarcastic eyes.

'He would say that fate had decreed that we should love. I begin to understand, Bab, that many men talk about fate because they are ashamed to speak of heaven.'

'Basil never gave up a word yet because he was ashamed to speak it!'

Anna looked troubled.

'He believes in God, for he has told me so, and I hope that . . . someday when he is no longer unhappy, when . . . perhaps he may be grateful, that he will realise to Whom he owes every blessing . . . Oh, Bab, it is wonderful! . . . I can scarcely believe that Basil can consider me worth

being grateful for; and yet I mean to be so true to him, so . . . unchanging!'

Barbara bit her lips. Here was a disposition which she could not ridicule, yet which was not unworthy of being sketched in the story which was to be a successor to 'Janet Wilbraham's Sacrifice.' Anna's new mood was perplexing.

'I'm glad you're fond of the old boy,' was all she could say at the moment. After a while she added, 'Of course Basil isn't an atheist; he's never been a commonplace member of his set.'

'You do not like me to blame myself for having given Mr. Hedworth pain, Barbara, yet surely you will agree that he has behaved most generously? He might have tried to hold me to my promise, or at least he might have insisted upon explaining to my father, and to everyone

in Maycross, that our engagement was broken.'

'That wouldn't have done him much good,' said Barbara, who was always severely practical when estimating virtue in others.

'His position all these months cannot have been an easy one.'

'Didn't I tell you, my dear, that the unpleasantness must have been his glory? All the while his spirit must have glowed within him with a martyr's pride. Every fresh congratulation he heard, every new question must have been a spark added to his spiritual warmth. Oh, these self-elected saints know how to take care of themselves; their joys they secretly exult over, but pretend to take seriously, and their sorrows they relish to the full. Don't look at me reproachfully, Anna! If you

had been trying all day to concoct a story about a "beautiful character" of some kind, and it's "beautifully endured" afflictions, you would understand why I speak bitterly about goodness and a good man's trials!'

'Oh, Bab, you are only echoing the cheap sneers of people who don't know any better. I know it's the fashion to sneer at literature that is "goody-goody," as it is called, but you cannot deny that there is nothing so worthy to be written about as the life of some good woman or man. And if God gives His own friends comfort, ought we, who are weak, to scoff at their privilege? Dear, the good man's heart may break, though he turns to heaven for comfort. I wish there were writers who could do justice to the subject of a strong nature's struggles against

sin. If the triumph of such a nature were written about as strongly as some authors write about the triumph of sin, there would not be one voice which would dare to call the story "goody-goody."'

'Bless my soul, Anna, you've developed into a strong nature yourself!'

'No,' said Anna, shaking her head, 'but I've learned to believe that there are strong natures often hidden in bodies which seem weak. Six months ago I had just learned that there are strong passions in the world. I was like a child before then; very small sins and virtues looked gigantic to my eyes, I couldn't make allowances for anybody, or pity people who were wicked. Bab, won't you try and write that story, of the man or woman who was both good and strong at once?'

Barbara shook her head now.

'Not if I know it! I'll do something less difficult, I'll write about some one who was wicked and weak, and end by making him see the error of his ways. The subject has been treated about sixty-million times since the days of Cain and Abel, but that doesn't matter. You shall help me, Anna.'

'I? Oh, I am ignorant!'

'All the better.'

'I know so little of life.'

'All the better, I say again. It's the men who sit scribbling in garrets who perform all the great deeds of the world; it's the agent who doesn't know what coal is, who makes and ends a strike which beggars thousands; it's the Cabinet Minister who has never seen a nigger who sets going the destruction of savage tribes! Bah! it's a hateful, hollow old world, and

we writers, who prate about "realism" are more false and hateful than anyone else!'

Barbara had sprung up, and was pacing the room excitedly, her arms crossed behind her back, her worn velvet gown trailing the ground, her curls, only restrained by an amber ribbon, dancing tumultuously on her shoulders. In her hand she held still an inky pen, the emblem of her craft, which had made a long smear down one breadth of her crimson skirt.

The next moment she had returned to the sofa and to Anna's side, and was laughing.

'I'm a humbug to everyone but you and Basil, so you must forgive me if I fly out now and again! I meant what I said, though! But if you'll help me to write a

decent moral story, I shall be everlastingly grateful to you.'

'You want to please *him*, dear?'

'I hope I've scandalised him thoroughly with my last tale, and if he expresses a proper amount of loathing for it, by way of convincing me that he also isn't a humbug, then I'll try to gratify the poor man. He's horribly in earnest, Anna. He's a terrible man; I sometimes wish I detested him; but I don't—I verily believe I love him!'

'I am sure you do, dear.'

'How contemptible! No doubt he despises me.'

'He will not, if you are true to yourself.'

'There's nothing true about me.'

'Yes, darling, a great deal; that is why you are so lovable.'

'I'm not lovable, I'm selfish.'

'You are not angry with me because . . .'

She hesitated. Barbara finished the sentence.

'Because Basil's heart is cut up,—a tiny bit dedicated to memory, a scrap to me, and all the rest to you? How do you know I don't secretly hate you?'

Anna drew her small friend into her arms and kissed her, not without solemnity.

'We mustn't get sentimental!' cried Barbara. '*There*! I heard a knock at the hall door, and I'm more unfit to be seen than usual, which is saying a great deal!'

'Who can it be?' asked Anna. 'This is not your "at home" day.'

Barbara coloured, and gave a nervous laugh.

'Perhaps it's the missionary. I was once foolish enough to tell him the truth, that he is welcome at any time.'

'You mean Mr. Hambleton.'

'Yes. Don't you hear the rubbing of his boots on the door-mat? No other man rubs his boots quite in the same way, not according to my ears. It would be more romantic if I knew the sound of his foot-fall instead of his foot-scraping, but fact is seldom romantic. Now he has put his umbrella in the stand;—it is a brown silk umbrella with a cherry-wood handle. Now he is coming upstairs.'

A servant announced the visitor.

Lynn Hambleton noticed the ink on Barbara's hand, but not the blush on her cheek.

He was a very modest man in many

ways, though he could express any opinion forcibly, and had been known to grow eloquent on a platform. His modesty made him doubt whether Barbara Morne would marry him did he ask her; and his common-sense, which was large, made him hesitate before asking.

Most people liked and admired Barbara, but no one quite trusted her; unless Anna was the exception.

'Miss Morne, I have taken advantage of your invitation,' he said, holding the inky hand firmly.

'I'm glad you thought it an advantage. If you had come on my "at home" day you would have found my acquaintances.'

'Instead of which I have been so fortunate as to find your friend,' he replied, as he turned to greet Anna.

'Bravo! you fitted in that answer very neatly,' cried Bab. 'I'll make the hero say it in my next story.'

Then, because she was only an inexperienced girl in spite of her woman of the world manner, her voice faltered to a whisper, her eyes fell: the thought of that unwritten story had confused her. She feared lest Mr. Hambleton might guess at those thoughts, might understand that she was miserable because she expected to hear him condemn her last work.

But really inexperienced girls usually take refuge from confusion in bravado, and an affectation of great ease. Therefore Barbara by an effort banished the soul from her eyes, and stared glassily in the face of the man she loved; looked at him, as she afterwards declared to Anna, as though he had been a stock or a stone. Girls often

pride themselves upon the power of looking unconscious, when, in reality, self-consciousness is printed in large type upon their faces.

'I must thank you for sending me a copy of your book, Miss Morne.'

'No, don't: I only send it to those friends who, I am certain, would not buy it.'

'You do not reckon me among them, I hope?'

'Oh, you are such a busy individual; such a trifle as a novel would be beneath your notice.'

'Not in any case, not even if written by a stranger. Fiction is a power in the land.'

'Ah, pray don't consider my work from that high and mighty standpoint. It is meant to amuse the ignorant, simple classes, not the over-educated masses.'

'If that were so, its responsibility would be all the greater—if the classes were ignorant and simple, I mean. Your writing could only be harmless, Miss Morne, to those who are of your own world, who can read with the jesting spirit of the author.

'*Harmless!*' exclaimed Bab, pretending to be greatly dismayed. 'Oh, Mr. Hambleton, I have received many settings-down on account of my literary indiscretions, but no one was ever before so cruel as to call my novels harmless!'

Lynn watched her, with a mixture of suspicion and indulgence. This was the mood in which he always found her, this the artificial manner she displayed for him. While he believed that it was but a manner, the result of a mood, his confidence in her innate sincerity received a shock.

And when Barbara's eyes met that keen

gaze, she hated herself for having provoked it.

Anna came forward and made a remark, which relieved the immediate tension of the conversation; but Barbara was resolved to force from the only critic she dreaded an expression of the disapproval she was sure he felt.

'You haven't told me your opinion of my "magnum opus,"' she said, boldly.

'May I be frank?'

'Oh, I'm sure you always are.'

'I liked it less and better than your former books. It is one which you may be proud of now for its cleverness, but one which, in a few years' time, you will be glad to forget. Miss Broughton agrees with me, I think?'

Anna looked up at the speaker and smiled.

'Miss Broughton doesn't know anything about it!'

'Perhaps not, dear,' said Anna. 'I do not pretend to know much about literature, but, if I may venture to have an opinion, I accept Mr. Hambleton's way of expressing it.'

'You've read it?'

'This winter I have read all your books.'

'I think the work is full of promise for the future,' Lynn added.

'Oh, please let us change the subject?' pleaded the author. 'I had no idea that my best friend had become my critic. Anna, it will be a long while before I shall be able to forgive you. Mr. Hambleton, you will take some tea, won't you? I know you advocate it.'

When he had gone, Barbara astonished

Anna by dancing about the room and clapping her hands.

'Oh, my darling old girl, I feel as though someone had loaded me with diamonds! He didn't call my poor book odious, after all.'

'Bab, you are the strangest creature I ever met! This very afternoon you said that you had written the story on purpose for him to loathe it.'

'Yes, I know,' said Barbara, 'but I must be inconsistent sometimes, or I shall die mad. He saw promise in it,—he thinks I can do better! Now I've got something to live for!—Nan, did you notice the antiquated cut of his clothes? The dear man was rich once, but he's squandered his fortune upon beggars and ragamuffins. He loves ragamuffins particularly,—there's nothing he wouldn't do

for them,—I've often wished I were a ragamuffin!'

'Would you enjoy the life, Bab?'

'My character would expand in the free atmosphere of the slums. Anna, you have learned to make fun of me while you've been away.'

'We are going to be sisters.'

'I shall not come to see you too often then, or I shall grow contemptible through familiarity. If you want a person to remain fond of you send him away sometimes, that he may view you from a distance. A human being is like a work of art, apt to look blurred if seen too closely. Oh, dear, I'm wasting brilliant reflections upon you, Nan, who look solemn when you ought to smile.'

'Many people must vex you in that way, Bab dear.'

'By-the-bye, I was going to ask after your brother, prodigal Dick, when the missionary interrupted us.'

'He wrote to me two months ago, to scold me for being unkind to Mr. Hedworth; that is the last I heard of him. There was no address given in his letter.'

'Then you can't go to see him now you are in town?'

'No,' said Anna, 'unless I ask Mr. Hedworth to . . .'

'Don't do that!' cried Bab, quickly, as she tossed back her dark curls. 'Ah, it's a queer world, old girl; nothing in it is stable but inconsistency!'

CHAPTER VII.

The rector of Maycross sat alone and meditated.

He was in the library, his own study; the room which was now most used in the house, since he had no reason for seeking the little boudoir upstairs, nor the drawing-room where was Anna's harmonium.

The rector's family had fallen away from him; neither wife nor child had he left.

When Richard had come home from the travelling which had been intended as a

continuation of college education on a practical scale, the young man had been greatly struck by the change which he had perceived in his father. Dick's eyes had noted a few minor indications of the real change, that the rector's hair was whiter, his back more bowed when he forgot to hold himself forcibly erect, that his face had gained those numerous lines which so soon destroy the healthy firmness of the flesh. Dick had not been qualified to see more, to look into the rector's heart and see that it too had become weaker. If the son had come home again now, he would again have been struck, for his father had aged fast during the months which had elapsed since Mrs. Broughton's death.

It was surprising that the loss of such a simple-minded, quiet little woman should

have affected any material change: but not until she was gone from him had the rector known how fond he was of her. During her lifetime he had sometimes said to himself that it is better for the clergy to remain unmarried; he had fancied that, had he been able to begin life over again, he would have made a small sacrifice gladly, and have devoted all his affection to his duty. Now he sometimes wondered why his home had been left desolate? He had even wished, once or twice, that death would take him also to where Alice had gone.

A really weak-minded man could not have admitted the extent of the loss more.

His wife was dead; his son he had turned away from home; his daughter had left home by her own desire.

He wondered whether the remainder of his years were to be lived alone? The wonder was inexpressibly melancholy. Then he began to feel angry with Anna. It was her duty to take her mother's place as far as she could; at least she could manage the household. As the rector's grief lessened, a less romantic desolation troubled him; the meals were served irregularly, the food was carelessly prepared, expenses seemed to multiply; he was vexed by a belief that matters domestic were going wrong.

Also the evenings were very long during winter and early spring. Of course he studied; he had always prided himself upon the possession of intellectual tastes, which were sufficient to make any dull life interesting; he had often exhorted young men, especially young curates, to

take up science, literature, the classics, any worthy brain-work, so that they might not stand in need of recreation which demanded companions; but now, as he read his learned books and treatises by the hour, he began to be of opinion that intellectual studies rob the brain too much. Often he would pace about the library, or take a rapid walk round the garden, because he dreaded a numb feeling which crept over him after long study. The truth is that a man, to be a good student, must inure himself to study from his boyhood; it is useless for an elderly man to take to brain-labour as recreation, unless he has learned how to make it recreative.

A few more months in his library, a few more long winter evenings full of hours to be killed, and the rector of Maycross would be a worn-out decrepit old man,

only fit to be laid on the shelf, as lay his mouldy volumes.

Without saying this to himself, he felt that he was in danger. He would not have been so much troubled by the slow hours if he had not felt that they were stealing life from him.

Not having any composition on hand, he studied merely for his own sake, by way of interesting himself and improving his mind. Once, many years ago now, he had thought that he might become more than a country rector;—he had been ambitious, as a man of dignified presence has many temptations to be. Then, when he had not had time, there had been a motive for self-improvement, but now his studies had no object.

When he beheld his life as though it were that of another man, he saw that it

had attained its zenith, and was beginning to wane. He would not become a great man after all. There is something sad, terribly sad, about the thought of a man who has once been full of youth's ambitions and hot enthusiasms;—looking backward he sees how great he believed he was, how much greater he meant to be, and knows that he will never be great at all. For though men are very vain, they seldom see the greatness in themselves which their good angels may see; they want large virtues, they aspire to be martyrs, whereas for every-day saintliness, though their lives may show it, they do not claim or expect reward.

This was one of the evenings when the Reverend John Broughton realised that mind-culture was of little use to him. He had been alone since the afternoon, when

Jane, his wife's favourite maid, had brought him in a cup of tea; and he knew that there was quite another hour before supper would be announced. After that meal he would smoke a cigar,—there was some solace in that,—and then he could go to bed. We are all slaves to habit, in one way or another, and the rector was no exception. He would have liked to sleep away a great many more of his hours than he did, but he could not break through his rule of retiring at half-past ten and rising at half-past six. Had he done so Jane would have carried the information into Maycross, and his parishioners would have convicted him of idleness.

He had just been studying an abstruse problem of theology, comparing an attack and a defence, seeing wherein the one was weak, the other strong. The mental ex-

ertion had elated him for the moment, but, as he suffered the reaction, becoming aware of weariness, he thought how little use the hardly-conquered point would be to him; he could not astonish his congregation by alluding to it in his sermons; if he wrote an essay on the subject for the local paper, no one would be able to understand it. There were London magazines, to be sure;—as a young man he had resolved to convert all atheists and agnostics through the medium of their pages,—but modesty made him doubt whether he could write so as to command a position in print of this kind. Then an impulse said to him 'strive,' but prudence, with louder voice, cried 'abstain.' Foreseeing probable rejection of his MS. the rector's thoughts became less lofty; he condescended to remember that the village postman would

bring him back his essay,—that all Maycross would soon know that a parcel from a London publisher had been delivered at the rectory. Once, maybe twice or three times, he could endure this; but not oftener. In Maycross he had a reputation to lose; he could not risk being called a failure.

Lives are made up of small things.

The rector pushed his books from him impatiently, and leant his forehead on his hands. Work was no use and idleness was misery. He had been paying visits all morning and afternoon, and there was no one left upon whom he could call. Besides, his bearing towards his parishioners, rich and poor alike, had always been formal; he had called upon them regularly, but never upon Saturday, the tidying-up day of the week, or upon Monday, washing-day.

He had gone into their homes at hours when he thought they could receive him properly, had seen chairs dusted to do him honour, had been a hindrance to work, had felt that had they not paid him strict attentions they would have been wanting in proper respect. There was not a home in Maycross where he could go familiarly as a friend. His visits had been acts of duty; his people had received them gratefully.

To go, late in the evening, to join some family circle for the sake of companionship, the comfort of a cosy fireside, the interest of a little harmless gossip, this the rector of Maycross could not do.

Some evenings his curate was a comfort to him, though, in their conversation together, the rector had never approached confidential relations. Hedworth was a

thoroughly estimable young man, and his daughter's betrothed; but he was also his curate, therefore his inferior, not his equal. To-night Hedworth had not come in for the usual talk upon parish matters, could not be pressed to stay for supper, or for the occasional recreation of a game of chess. The curate had gone to London that morning early, and had not returned.

As the rector, with his head bowed and his eyes closed, gave himself up to meditation, his thoughts played havoc with his heart, and told him many unpleasant home truths. He had behaved well all his life, yet he reproached himself for many a wasted opportunity. To his parish he had been an object of reverence, in his home he had been loved, but the love might have been better deserved, the reverence might have been made affectionate. His

son . . . well, his son, to state the matter simply, had disgraced himself;—which may have been the fault of his upbringing, for which a father is responsible;—his daughter . . .

The rector lowered his hands suddenly and sat up in his chair; he had made a plan. Anna should return at once, and should marry Hedworth as soon as possible. Surely Maycross would not be shocked if the wedding took place eight months after her mother's death? And, with Anna's return, household affairs would improve; while, during the evening, he would read aloud to her, books which would improve *her* mind. There was some sense in improving the mind of a woman who would be a rector's wife some day, possibly the mother of sons.

He remembered that Anna had said that

in accepting Hedworth she had made a mistake, because she did not love him as well as a wife should love her husband,—but then that was no doubt merely Anna's pride, inherited pride! She had meant that Philip, though estimable, was not quite worthy of the honour she had done him.

'That is true,' said the father to himself. 'I've not a word to say against Hedworth personally, but my daughter might have done better for herself; so the world will say.'—As to the question of wifely love? why, Anna need not trouble about that until she was a wife. It was Philip who must concern himself about it; that which he deserved, she would pay him.

The vision of the future which the rector saw then was by no means an unattractive one. Anna and her husband

should live with him at the rectory; the house was quite large enough for two families,—much too large for a lonely widower; Grace should be given the cottage, and Hedworth's children would continue to pass most of their time with her. Trot and Jerry could not be taken into the rectory, that was more than the curate could expect; but if in that future, which was beginning to look homelike and happy, there should be other babies,—why they would be different,—the rector's grandchildren would have a claim upon him.

In thought he saw himself growing older and older, becoming a picturesque figure in the church and about the village, he heard people saying of him, 'our dear old rector;' and, as he thought, tears came into his eyes. There would be his daugh-

ter to care for him, little voices to prattle to him, and he would willingly retire into private life at last, to occupy that arm-chair by the chimney-corner which he would only leave for his death-bed, when every heart in Maycross would lament him; he would see Anna's husband rector in his place, and would give the young man much valuable counsel!

He liked his day-dream of the future so well,—he was just grieving at his own funeral,—that he was sorry when Jane called him to supper by sounding the great gruff gong in the hall.

But even supper was more enjoyable to-night, now he had planned what to do, had seen the possibility of a happy end to his denuded life. He ate heartily, helped himself to two glasses of the old port

wine which he often gave to invalid parishioners but seldom touched himself.—This was a gala occasion.—He had given up ambition with the prime of his manhood, and had found out that old age, decay, death, may not be terrible as they are usually considered.

He thought how his enemies—for he had some, both in Maycross and Huntstown—would gradually cease to dislike him or rebel against his authority, growing to feel for him that respect which is half regard, which very old men and women may easily command. His years would secure him admiration. And Mrs. Drinkwater, who was now ninety, could not be expected to be witness to his feeblest progress down the village street; she would not be there at her window, to mock him with,

'Good-morning, parson, we be kinsfolk now, you know.'

At present Mrs. Drinkwater was one of the rector's daily crosses.

While he had been grieving at home for the desolation which had come to him, one other enemy of his, Purvis, had made a social advance. No one in Maycross knew how the captain made his money, but he was richer than he had been, and his income seemed steadily on the increase. Added to this was a fact of which gossip made much, namely, his selection as Radical and Labour candidate for the Bale Hill division of the county. Purvis's political views were many-sided, his opinions not too stable, his sympathies elastic, but his eloquence and earnestness were always beyond dispute. He might have coquetted with many principles, but he had never

denied that he was 'the friend of the poor.'

Purvis was not often at Maycross now, so the rector was spared the annoyance of meeting him; but the newspapers were busy with his name. London had become the chief scene of the captain's activity; his face was becoming well-known in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons, and in the pages of comic journals.

The rector's supper was protracted as long as reasonable, for he preferred the cheerful gas-lighted dining-room to his study, with its one shaded lamp and many associations with memory.

But he could not linger in the dining-room when he knew that Jane was waiting to clear away, and wondering why he was so much longer than usual; she would

look curiously at the food when she came in, to calculate how large his appetite had been.

So he rose, and went slowly back.

CHAPTER VIII.

As he sank again into his round-backed, leather-covered chair before his desk, he heard steps on the gravel path of the garden, and his face lighted up with expectation. Going to the window, he threw back the glass door, looked out into the cold spring night, and called aloud,

'Is that you, Hedworth?'

The curate had not meant to pass without entering; he was already on the steps. Now he came along the verandah and entered the library.

Mr. Broughton took him by the arm, and, after drawing him in to the chimney-corner, shut the window again, and poked the dull coals until a flame shot from them.

'You see, I . . . I am all alone, Hedworth, and, upon my word, I was getting quite dispirited; I couldn't let you go by.'

The admission was made with a nervous laugh, and an air of condescension.

'I was coming in, sir. My sister does not mind waiting up for me when she is prepared, and I told her I might be late to-night.'

Two arm-chairs were drawn side-by-side before the fire. The red glow fell upon two contrasted faces,—Philip's pale, earnest, with a curious look of suppressed feeling shown by the mouth and eyes; the rector's not as strong as it once had been, plainly

telling of his mood, that he was disposed to be confidential, less severe than usual.

Philip was almost handsome in this light, his head might have been carved in a cameo, the features were so refined; his fair beard, which his restless fingers unconsciously stroked into a point, was becoming to him. His black clothes were part of the shadow beyond the fire-glow: only his head stood forward clearly. There was nothing absurd in his appearance now; the kind obscurity hid the prosaic facts that his wristbands were ragged, and his best coat shiny down the back.

The rector had always been a handsome man; the knowledge of his good looks had helped to mould his character.

'Let us have a chat, Hedworth, as you are not in a hurry. You shall tell me all you have been doing in town, and I will

let you hear of a plan I have been making this evening. First though, won't you take a glass of wine?'

This was a special occasion, and the rector wished to show that he considered it so.

Probably the curate was surprised by the honour shown him,—especially as he guessed that his rector was offering him the old port,—for he declined quickly.

'You are very kind, but I will take no wine, thank you. Your plan? . . . did I not understand that you have a plan? Is it anything to do with the future?'

'Yes. You will be pleased, Hedworth, and it will give me pleasure to gratify you.'

'I am afraid,' said the curate, 'that my news and your plan will clash.'

Mr. Broughton noticed now that, while

he himself was in a genial mood, enjoying the luxury of the cosy warmth and the informal chat, Hedworth was not quite at his ease, evidently under the influence of some secret trouble.

He surveyed him for a few seconds, while the silence was unbroken, trying to understand the strange manifestation.

'You have not been offered a living, I suppose?'

'No, no, sir.'

'Then you must be under a misapprehension. I know of nothing that can interfere with my plan for the future.'

The rector's heart was warm with genuine satisfaction at the thought of the pleasure he was about to give.

'Now,' he added, rubbing his hands together near the bars of the grate, 'let me hear your news first. It can't be very

good, I fear, and had better be got rid of.'

Philip turned his face away again. He could find words more easily, could speak them with greater self-control, when his eyes were watching the red-hot depths of the fire.

'I have been to see Anna to-day,' he began, speaking as unemotionally as he could, and choosing his sentences carefully. 'When you told me a few days ago that she was going to town to stay with her friend Miss Morne, I wrote and asked her when I might call upon her. She appointed to-day.'

'And you went. Quite right,' said the father, but not without anxiety.

'She was kind, exceedingly kind.'

'Right again. Then what is the matter, Philip? I thought you had perhaps been having some lover's quarrel.'

The rector's laugh jarred upon his own ears.

'We could not do that, sir, because we are not—lovers.'

'What is this? Not lovers? You're too modest a man to expect my girl to be head-over-ears in love with you, I'm sure of that, Hedworth; and you know very well that Anna is not the sort of young woman who encourages romantic notions. So you've been worrying yourself for nothing, have you? You don't think she is fond enough of you. Why, all I can say is, that you must make yourself dear to her.'

Philip shook his head.

'You must not become egotistical, you must not expect too much,' continued the rector, in his most expressive voice of exhortation.

'It has been a mistake all the while. Anna found out many months ago that she was not able to care for me as well as she had promised to do; and though she has had time for reflection since then, I had no hope that she would have learned to love me. All that while ago, sir, I gave her back her promise; so I have not been living upon false hopes.'

'She will not take back her promise, you may rely on that, Hedworth. Admitting that she cannot give you as much love as I believe you have for her,—indeed she has told me so herself,—there is no reason why you should not be happy as man and wife. She will care for you more as the years pass. You need have no fear that my daughter will . . . jilt you.'

Philip smiled bitterly.

'True, she has not done so, but I have

been jilted none the less. There is no one to blame but myself, that is some comfort. For herself she would not have accepted her release from that promise,—she would have sacrificed her own happiness, in order to abide by a bond of words,—but she could not refuse to do it for the sake of the man she loves.'

The face of the father grew white and stern. As he changed, Philip became more voluble, more earnest.

'You must forgive us, sir, for not having told you earlier. This occurred a few days after . . . your great trouble; I could not intrude upon your grief with my tale of disappointment. No doubt I never had any right to consider myself able to win Anna's heart. My sister has often accused me of presumption.'

'She told you, with her own lips, that

she has thrown you over for the sake of another man?'

'She was surprised into loving him. He pleaded his cause suddenly, at a time when she felt the loneliness of sorrow, the need of a comforter, before she had guessed that she was learning to care more for him than for me. And it was by my wish that he spoke.'

'*Your wish?*'

The rector's mind was not as quick as it had been at perceiving the point of a story or an argument.

'Yes,' said Philip. 'He came to me first, told me that he thought Anna cared for him, was unhappy in her engagement, declared that he loved her devotedly, with the truth of a man who had loved before, and lost all that made life worth living. Of course I combated that unchristian

way of speaking, but I saw by his manner that his tale was an honest one. It was very pathetic also.'

The curate was full of sympathy even now for the man who had robbed him of so much. Basil Morne's story had indeed been told well.

The rector, who was not unselfish by nature, had one overwhelming anxiety upon his mind.

'Who is he? . . . Tell me his name, Hedworth?'

'Miss Morne's brother.'

'That . . . that man of the world?'

Mr. Broughton sank back in his chair, bringing down his right hand heavily upon his knee. The gesture signified his despairing conviction that both his children had been born to be a trouble to him.

'Hedworth, you're scarcely like a man!

You bear this as a girl might bear it; you seem to have no indignation, no right feeling, no . . .'

He stopped, remembering that the indignation, if it existed, would be against his own daughter.

'Of course you must be resigned . . . everything is ordained wisely, . . . but a little human vexation would surely be excusable, natural. Anna has behaved badly. I cannot defend her conduct. I will argue with her, if you wish.'

'My dear sir, that would be quite useless. As you say, it is all ordained. I have felt that. Do you think I want to hold a woman to her promise when her heart is given to another man? There was always a strange doubt in my happiness, I could not understand how it was possible that she had chosen me. You would

not have me show anger with her because she was true to herself, rather than to an engagement into which she had entered too lightly?'

'But, don't you *care*, man?'

There was no answer for a few minutes. Philip's face was turned away. Then he rose, and held out his hand to his rector.

'You didn't mean to hurt me, sir; I forgive you.'

A curious sensation came over the elder man, a feeling of oppression; he wanted to understand his curate's feelings, to sympathise, to exhort him, and there seemed to be some spiritual barrier between them—something undefinable, not respect exactly, nor fear of giving offence—which kept back the words he would have spoken, prevented that union of their hearts which common trouble should have brought about.

'I forgive you.' No one had said that to the rector for many years; he had instead been in a position to forgive others. Now his curate, the last creature in the world from whom he could have expected it, had so used the words that he could feel no resentment, only that vague wonder. For the moment—of course for no longer—Hedworth occupied the superior position. Sorrow has a dignity which cannot be denied, even by those who object to giving honour where honour is due; but the rector had not believed that his curate had strong emotions of any kind. The discovery that Hedworth was suffering, gave his religious superior that odd feeling of bewilderment. It made him hesitate so long before replying that Hedworth spoke again first.

'This is news to you, but I have known

it all the winter. If it is for her happiness I would not have it otherwise.'

'But *is* it? Mr. Morne is a stranger.'

'To us but not to her.'

'Why did I let her go to London? You are too good to her, Hedworth; you ought to have reasoned with her. She cannot expect *me* to countenance her conduct. There will be a second scandal in my family for Maycross gossip to feed upon, and you will be pitied over every tea-table.'

The rector spoke bitterly, as he felt. His plan, which he had formed in order to remedy the loneliness of his home, had suddenly become valueless; all his day dreams had been as vain as such dreams usually are. There would be no happy family in the rectory, no children's voices, no capable housekeeper; his own old age would be passed alone, his evenings would all

be long and dreary, until the time came for that last sinking to sleep, when Anna and her husband might perhaps come from some distance in order to show respect when he needed no more from them. They would close his eyes, he would lie beside Alice in the churchyard under the lime-branches, and some stranger would reign at the rectory.

As he thought of all this it seemed to him that Hedworth's loss could be nothing compared to his.

'I shall not give my consent to her marriage with Mr. Morne.'

'Do not say that, sir. They love one another.'

'At least the wedding shall not take place here.'

'For my own sake, I venture to ask you to alter that decision. Do not give people

excuse for saying that you and I are against her. She did not change to me of her own will, but rather in spite of it. Ought you to punish her because she made a mistake which might have spoiled her life?'

'I've no patience with your defence of her conduct, Hedworth! I tell you she has brought disgrace upon me—both my children have proved unworthy. She chose you—I like you; I could give her to you willingly. Now she has chosen a man who is a complete stranger to me.'

'Anna is much altered,' said the curate, slowly, 'she is improved, she is in earnest, she is happy. A woman's education is not finished, sir, until she loves.'

'Nor then,' said the rector, 'not until she has learned to suffer.'

It was strange that this observation

should have been made by him, for he did not often generalise when forming an opinion; but, for once in his life, he had spoken a profound truth on the spur of the moment.

He did not foresee any probable suffering for Anna; he merely felt that she deserved to learn a lesson hardly.

CHAPTER IX.

Basil Morne came down from London to see the rector of Maycross. All his diplomatic talents had to be exercised before the offended old man was willing to regard him kindly as Anna's future husband. Yet, while feeling no sympathy with his arguments, the rector could not refuse to be on amicable terms with him.

When Basil alluded to religion in his quasi-respectful way, Mr. Broughton was

perplexed; the younger man touched lightly upon fragments of beliefs, alluded to strange modern theories, of which the elder had barely heard, and spoke of Anna as of a beautiful gifted creature fitted to shine in drawing-rooms and political salons.

The rector felt bewildered.

'We both believe in the Bible, I hope,' he answered dubiously; 'and Anna is a good girl who has been well brought up.'

At last he closed the interview by consenting to allow the wedding to take place in his own church, on condition that six months should elapse first, and the ceremony be ultimately performed by the Bishop or some stranger.

When Mr. Morne had gone back to town, life at the rectory recommenced

in its old order; there were comfortless meals and long evenings; and though the curate came in sometimes for a game of chess, the rector no longer felt pleasure in his company. He reminded the aging man of the plan which was impossible. Anna would not bring her husband to live in the large, rambling, comfortless rectory; he was a stranger, and no amount of time could alter this.

She had proposed that she should come home for awhile, but her father had written telling her to stay away, or only to run down for a day to see him. In the bitterness of his last loss he was not quite just; he feared that she might change her mind again about marrying Basil,—which would be a third disgrace.

Anna had not wished to come home,

she had proposed to return because she had wished to be dutiful. As a matter of fact, when she did come, for the one day, two small clouds came over her happiness. Her father told her that Philip was suffering keenly, and she saw again her mother's grave. She faced Maycross proudly, for, in the largeness of her love, she gloried in her second engagement.

Yet neither of the two causes of grief affected her as they might have done. She told her father he must be mistaken, —Philip had long ago assured her that he would soon recover from his disappointment; and by her mother's grave she was reminded of the night when Basil had appeared on the other side of the mound, had held out his hand to her, crying 'Anna!' and had taught her in

one second the secret of her heart. She did not mean to be selfish, but her own world of joy was so bright that the rest of the world looked dim and insignificant.

Her manner to her father was affectionate, but she spoke very plainly to him of all those matters in which she had ceased to agree with him. About Richard, —she said that Mattie was not much to blame after all, that Dick ought to be forgiven now, to come home and be reconciled.

'Mother wanted you to pardon them, you ought to carry out her wish,—and Mattie could educate herself so as to take my place here and keep house for you.'

About the curate she said,

'Mr. Hedworth is so good, I believe

he is a saint in some ways, he cannot fail to be happy some day; no earthly loss will affect him very much. After all, he has his children.'

Anna had learned to love, but only when she had learned the lessons of sorrow would her narrow passion be permanently changed into a universal tenderness.

She bewildered the rector almost as much as Basil had done. She spoke of society, of Basil's position in it, of all his schemes for the benefit of humanity, of Lord Illworth's confidence in him; of his eloquence and nobility of character. She was going to persuade him to champion every right cause, to punish all wrong-doers, and be the protector of the distressed;—he was to manage a party without being dependent, to become a Cabinet

Minister who would never shut his lips over an inopportune opinion.

When Anna was gone, the rector began to wonder how so much was to be done by a man who would not ask God's blessing on his toil?

The announcement that Anna was going to marry Mr. Morne instead of the curate, interested but did not surprise Maycross. For months Mr. Hedworth had avoided speaking Anna's name; she had been away, while he had been living his usual life. The general opinion was that now she had given up parish work and become worldly he was well rid of her;—London was to blame for the change. Of course he was pitied for his natural feelings of chagrin, but widowers are seldom credited with the power of loving deeply.

Kate Ruggles indeed wept copiously

over the wrongs of Philip, because he had befriended Tom Casson; she declared that he was 'as good as an angel out of heaven, but such people were always unfortunate.'

Mrs. Drinkwater chuckled over the news, and cried out when the rector next passed her window,—'Young folks and their love affairs are vexing, eh, parson? I should say your family's been a bit o' a nuisance to you;—one eloping, an' the model one turned out a jilt.'

The rector's own dislike for the approaching marriage remained strong. He had wanted his daughter to become his housekeeper, his comforter in his old age, and she was going further from him; with the fashionable man of the world whom she loved, he had nothing in common.

And when he saw Hedworth's patient,

smiling face, he felt the shame he would have had Anna feel.

So time went on, without improving anything.

Anna and Barbara Morne were happy together. Both Basil's sister and Basil's betrothed found that the months slipped by quickly.

They were working part of the time,—a few hours every day, that is to say,—upon the book which was to be strictly moral, exciting, and modern, in order that Mr. Hambleton might understand that Barbara's motives were as excellent as her talent for producing marketable fiction. Anna was helping. This was a new experience for her; and though she could not have written the story, her suggestions as to the developments of its plot were really valuable; also she had a clear man-

ner of seeing when the conduct of the characters threatened to become unduly frivolous or worldly.

Bab's ideas sometimes ran away with her pen. Caustic remarks or witty epigrams occurred to her now and again, which would have been out of place in the mouth of a sincere and gentle heroine, but which she was with difficulty restrained from writing. As a concession, Anna agreed that the villain of the tale might be allowed to speak them, so Bab's evil sarcasms were noted down and introduced gradually into that gentleman's conversation.

Then the London season, the first Anna had known, engrossed much of the time of these girls. With Miss Hilda for a chaperon, they went into society, where they met not only Basil and Mr. Hambleton, the two men whose good opinion they

were most anxious to obtain and keep, but a host of friends who were amusing and instructive.

All this was part of Anna's education. Not that it is necessary that a woman, to be educated, should mix in circles where dinners and dances afford opportunity for psychological study; many there are who have lived in villages only, and have attained to their full soul-growth.

Mr. Hambleton was watching Barbara with interest, and she knew this.

She had been more influenced by her knowledge of his opinions, likes and dislikes, than she had known, so that her last book, which she had produced out of a spirit of bravado, as a test of his honesty, had contained more that was praiseworthy than any other she had ever written. The characters she had intended to ridicule

had become sympathetic to her before she had finished with them.

Lynn Hambleton, being shrewd, had been pleased not with the book, but with the promise it had given of better books to come. He saw now that Barbara was 'settling down,' as the phrase goes. She was less artificial, more human.

She felt that he was less severe a critic, and, as she became happier, became also more worthy of happiness.

Of Anna it is enough to say that she was glad. Her life had attained an altitude of joyousness which made earth a heaven. Sometimes she wondered if love always brought such joy, or whether she, who had dreamed once of romance as a precious gift, had dreamed this possession of it also? Would she not wake some day to find that the dream had passed?

Yet to imagine this as possible was treachery, for was it not doubting the lasting quality or the value of Basil Morne's devotion?

He had brought her out of the darkness into the light. He had been her deliverer. She had sat at home longing for something vague, something she could not name at all unless she called it romance, and it was more than that; and he had come out of his higher world to take her by the hand, had raised her up, so that her eyes had become strengthened by a greater light than they had ever felt. She knew that from a doubting, prejudiced, ignorant girl, she had become a woman.

True, she could see now, looking backwards at the old life, that it was she who had been narrow, not it. But this revelation also she owed to Basil.

There seemed to be no possibility that her joy would ever cease, for, trying to look into the future, to be prepared for the sorrows which must lurk there, the unavoidable shadows of great happinesses, she saw always Basil.

In her undoubting love for him this made her unable to fear.

Her manner to him was simple, letting him understand that he was her king, that she blessed him every hour and every second. When he entered a room, her fair face turned towards him, gaining radiance; when he left her she would speak hopefully of the next meeting. Never exacting, always pleased, her sweet temper charmed him. He was, as Barbara had told Anna, very ambitious. He was also eloquent, and Anna, hearing his words, seeing his pale eyes alight with

the fires of enthusiasm, knowing that she was able to influence his opinions, thanked heaven that she had been allowed to meet and love this hero.

July came, the London season ended; Barbara, Anna, and Miss Hilda went abroad, following Basil who accompanied Lord Illworth. The elderly Minister took a benevolent interest in his secretary's engagement, and Anna soon regarded him as one of her best friends. By the first of September they were in England again, sometimes at the sea-side, sometimes in the country; the three women were good companions. At the end of October the six months' probation upon which the rector had insisted would be over, and the marriage day was fixed.

A fortnight before this date Anna went home.

She entered the village feeling like a conqueror, expecting congratulations. Her elation was only a little chilled by the thought of meeting Philip Hedworth.

When he came to the rectory, into the drawing-room where she was seated before the harmonium, she was surprised to see that he looked many years older; there was even a streak of gray in his fair beard.

A troubled fear possessed her that she had forfeited his good opinion; this made her eyes wistful. But the fear did not last after he had spoken.

'I am glad you are home.'

'And I am so glad to see you!'

Children could not have spoken more simply; there seemed little meaning in the words, but neither Anna nor Philip was conscious of any poverty of expression. If

it was painful for him to meet her he did not wince or in any way betray that he suffered; and she regarded him as a worthy clergyman, forgetting that as a man he was not devoid of any human feeling.

Of his pride she had never thought, nor of his jealousy. Both qualities were not to be suspected in the character of a curate of such spiritual excellence.

Some men would have exacted payment for a sacrifice such as Philip had made. He had voluntarily given up his claim upon Anna, permitting her other lover to say to her, 'You are free.' Instead of having done this, he might have sought a scene with her, in which he could have shown her the generosity of his conduct, by explaining his unalterable regard, his life-long fidelity. Now again he had an op-

portunity to exact payment. By a glance, a sigh, a hand-pressure he could have forced pity, self-reproach from her. Few men, in his place, would have acted unselfishly.

He merely shook her hand cordially, as a friend might, and said, 'I am glad you are home.'

When she answered, 'I am so glad to see you,' he did not sigh.

'Grace sent you her love,' he said, 'and Trot and Jerry won't be pacified unless you will let them run in this evening.'

'Dear little souls!' cried Anna. 'Oh, I thought of them so often!'

And to herself she said,

'He has his children to comfort him.'

Perhaps Philip guessed that this was her opinion, for at the moment he smiled indulgently.

She did not understand *his* love, he knew that, but, whereas most lovers would have smarted under this knowledge, he was pleased at it—for her sake.

From that moment of meeting, Anna was completely at her ease. To Philip she told her small anxieties and wishes respecting her father, and Dick and Mattie—her hope that some day the rector's heart would soften toward his son and son's wife, so that the rectory might not remain without a mistress. On the subject of Richard, Philip and Anna agreed now; she owned, with a real humility which was sweet to see, Philip thought, that she had formerly been unjust to Mattie, because she had resented the girl's small airs and attempts at familiarity, and had disliked the idea that Dick was being persuaded into making a mésalliance.

'It was very unworthy,' Anna said; 'but I did not know then how high true love is in value. I thought of Mattie always as Purvis's daughter, whereas, of course, Dick thought of her as the woman he loved. If she is good to him, and he is happy, I am glad that he did not give her up.'

'Dick is very happy,' Philip answered. 'He writes to me often.'

'Why will he not come to see me? Why will he not send me his address? I would make friends with Mattie.'

The curate looked as though he could tell a tale which would surprise Anna; but he had evidently some strong reason for not doing so. There was a mystery connected with Richard. Anna repeated impatiently—'Why will he not come?'

'Because he is not sure of a welcome.'

'But I have told him, in my last letter I assured him, that I want to be the means of reconciling him with father!'

'If you wish,' said Philip gravely, 'I will do my best to persuade him to . . . . come to your wedding.'

The words cost him an effort to speak.

Anna blushed a little, but she guessed nothing of the curate's feelings, had no suspicion that, in that passing moment, he had fought a battle with himself and come off victor. She was thinking of herself, her own affairs. It was amazing that Richard would not listen to her entreaties, and more amazing that Philip should be able to succeed where she had failed.

In her new kindness for Dick and Mattie she was thwarted, put aside, as it were, by this man, who was no relation.

'You do not mean to say that Dick *will* stay away?—that he will need persuading to come?'

'There may be different reasons which will have weight with him. Can he meet his father as a stranger?'

'Father will forgive and forget, for that day at least!'

Poor Anna was still proud; she could not believe that her wedding-day could bring her contradictions at home, that her father would be able to refuse any concession to a child, his only daughter, who was leaving the old nest for ever.

'I wish I were sure of that,' Philip said earnestly. 'I will let Dick know your opinion as well as your wish, but I cannot promise that he will be guided by them or by my advice. And even if he were wil-

ling to come, he may not care to leave his wife; he is anxious about her just now.'

The rector heard all this, the arguments for and against Richard's coming were detailed to him by his daughter. He could not bring himself to withdraw his prohibition against his son's return, but neither did he threaten to refuse to speak to him if he came. With this Anna had to be content.

She found her father more difficult to manage. In her younger days she had been able to coax him, but now he was more firm, more severe, less influenced by caresses and tender words. One day he said to her,—

'My dear, you and I are further apart than we used to be. You have chosen to make your life in a world I do not know.'

'But, father,' she pleaded, 'I am quite as fond of you.'

The unmentioned cause of their strangeness to each other was that the child had become the critic. She saw her parent now as a prejudiced old man, not as a hero; and though she was more tender to him than she had ever been, he missed the old reverence which had gratified him.

On the wedding-eve, Anna, who was sitting in a chair drawn close to his before the fire, rose suddenly, and laid her arms round his neck, stroked his white hair, kissed his forehead and his cheek.

'Dear, you must let me come to stay with you sometimes. Basil will be a busy man, he may have to go about the country a good deal, working for his cause; people have found out already how eloquent he is, and make many calls upon him; and

then I shall want to come home to see for myself that you are being taken good care of!'

The rector took her hands firmly, and put them away from him, with a pressure which was meant to mitigate the unkindness of the action.

'There, there, my dear, you have made me lose the page in my book. This is your home if ever you are in need of one, but you must not imagine that I cannot take care of myself. I have engaged an excellent housekeeper upon a friend's recommendation.'

Anna laughed, though she wanted to sob. It was not that she regretted the old home, but it was so strange to be told that her father was consoled already for her loss, by the knowledge that he had

obtained the services of an excellent housekeeper.

That night she cried, and the morning dawn found her eyes still wet.

Weeping was a novel way of expressing grief, she thought; she could only remember crying once before since her childhood, and that had been over the pages of a novel which had come with some books for her library, that story which had roused in her a rebellious desire to leave the peaceful rectory, to test the reality of that land of romance which novel-writers do not own exclusively. At her mother's death-bed she had not wept.

Now her desire was no longer denied her; she had already seen the strange land, for the future she was to live in it. Beautiful it was, all-excellent in her eyes;

and Basil's, her husband's hand was to lead her through pleasant paths.

Yet, perhaps because old associations are very strong, she wept on this last night at home.

CHAPTER X.

With the morning came Barbara, the one bridesmaid, and Anna's uncle, who was to give her away.

The rector did not come down to breakfast, having announced that he was indisposed, which was true in one sense of the word. The old man's will was firm as adamant; he had said that he would not appear at his daughter's wedding, and he kept his word.

The bride had received many presents, some valuable, some very trivial; Kate

Ruggles had manufactured a cake which was supposed to be equal to the productions of Buszard; Mrs. Drinkwater had sent a bouquet of white everlasting-flowers from her garden, a gift which she intended to signify that mourning was not inappropriate to the occasion.

The curate's offering was a china clock, from himself, Trot, and Jerry.

Bab was full of merriment, some of which was on the surface, and some heart-deep. Her dear brother,—that king among men, the only truly lovable man in the world,—was happy; she had conspired to make him so: and if she was desperately jealous of Anna, it was only by fits and starts of impulse.

Two events occurred in the morning. One was the arrival of a telegram from Dick announcing the birth of his son; and

the other was a message from the Bishop who was to have performed the wedding ceremony, declaring his inability to be present. Both events seriously troubled the rector.

From his locked room upstairs he had heard all morning the coming and going of many feet, the sound of many voices, and had felt bitterly that in all he had no part,—he was forgotten, or worse, disregarded. The news of his grandson's birth came to him as a shock, for he had fancied that grandchildren would someday play about the rectory,—it had been part of his dream of the future,—that happy plan which Anna had destroyed by her conduct. This grand-child could not be taken into his heart, lonely though he was.

It was Purvis's grand-child also.

He could not help sympathising for an instant with the joy of the young father, his son Dick. But next instant he remembered only that the mother was the daughter of his enemy. The second event obliged him to take an active step. He sent for his curate.

Philip came at once, to find his rector reading by the fire, or pretending to read.

'Hedworth, the Bishop cannot come to-day. You must send to Tullingham for Brook.'

'Mr. Brook is away.'

'There is not time to send to Grayford.'

'Will you not——'

'No,' cried the rector, sharply. 'You should know better than to ask me. I have said that I will not openly countenance this marriage, Hedworth. I wish

to mark my sense of the wrong Anna has done you . . . And I am not well this morning.'

'If you will not do it, sir, I must,' said Philip.

The curate made every effort to obtain the services of some other clergyman, but excuses and refusals were all he received; and when the time for the wedding came he was ready to conduct the ceremony.

The village church was crowded; every eye was upon him, as he stood facing the congregation and the bride and bridegroom. Once he felt that he had set himself a task too hard, that his strength was unequal to the demand made upon it; but he set his teeth, clenched his hands and prayed.

Not a muscle of his face moved, not a tremor broke his voice.

It was an ordeal such as few men have to endure, and though the neighbours pitied him they had no comprehension of his suffering; they thought that he was behaving well, that he was sensibly showing that he and Anna were good friends still; they did not know that his soul was struggling with passions of love and hate.

There was no address to the newly-married couple, but the curate blessed them with fervour. Forgetting his own wrong, he looked into the face under the white veil, the blushing, smiling, proud face,—and wished for her future, asked from God for her, all benefits and perfect content. In the vestry he pressed her hand and repeated the blessing; then turned to Mr. Morne.

'I am sorry the Bishop was not here, but I have done my best for you; and the music, at least, was excellent.'

Basil thought of the former interview he had with him when he had consented to set Anna free; and wondered why some men accept failure and sorrow as their expected portion?

'We are very grateful to you!' said Anna's happy voice.

'God bless you both!' added the little man again, solemnly. 'May He lead you along one secure and peaceful path.'

When Trot said her prayers that night aloud by papa's knee, according to custom she said aloud,

'An' please, dear God, be vewy kind to Miss Anna.'

'My little girl,' whispered her father,

'for the future you must say, "Mrs. Morne," not "Miss Anna."'

'It doesn't sound the same, somehow!' said Trot, puzzled. 'I can't quite believe it's *weally* her, can you, papa?'

But papa nodded his head; kissing Trot's curls so that she could not read his weakness in his eyes.

'Oh, yes dear,' he answered.

When Philip realised that all was over, that Anna had gone away, not only from him—he had grown used to that—but from Maycross, he felt weary. Active sorrow would have been easier to bear, for his resignation stole away all his courage instead of bracing it. There was no enemy to be fought, no watches to keep hourly. Small duties were nerve-wearing. Being of weak nature his loss would have soured his temper if he had not been sincerely

religious. No earthly distress could make him rail against God, for he never left off believing that all things are wisely ordered.

And this confidence, which nothing but faith can give, is the only safe happiness. Faith in human friends is not absolute. A friend unburdens his whole heart to a friend, but there are seconds when he wonders if he is understood, if he is not being secretly condemned. His own motives for the action of which he is telling, for instance, may have been absolutely noble, but he cannot be sure that his friend will not miss the point of this.

No one who makes a friend of God is troubled in this way.

Philip had no longer the excitement of any struggle. In the village there was

no chance of meeting Anna. The parishioners were of opinion that he had quite got over his own disappointment, since he had been able to perform the ceremony without betraying emotion.

Of course he thought often about her, telling himself that the fact that she had once promised to marry him was insignificant when compared with the greater fact that she had never loved him. The loss would have been hard, but the knowledge that he had never had anything to lose was infinitely harder. Philip threw himself ardently into his chosen work now, and God seemed all the nearer because the world was cold.

Anna's education was, in a way, Hedworth's education also; for though he had learned his lesson of life earlier, it had never been brought home as forcibly to his

mind as it was now, by his earthly loneliness. His sister Grace was not sympathetic. She regarded Anna as a wicked woman, and spoke of her harshly, often summing up all her wrong-doings, which culminated in her having allowed Philip to read the marriage-service.

He, maddened by the rousing of sharp memories, kept down his anger manfully, but suffered none the less.

'Grace, I will have no more of this,' he would cry sometimes, when he felt that his patience would hold out no longer; then she would nod her head triumphantly, and answer,

'Ah, you can't defend her, brother, so you want to change the subject!'

She believed that frequent condemnation of Anna would eventually cure Philip's 'infatuation.'

All that winter Philip would gladly have spent much of his time with his rector, but Mr. Broughton never invited him oftener than once a week. There was no interest which they shared. The rector had begun to take pleasure in the animal gratifications of comfort, good meals, good fires, easy-chairs, and soothing cigars; and these satisfactions, though not culpable, he could not lower his dignity by allowing Hedworth to observe and share. He had given up intellectual pleasures, study wearied him. He was aging too soon, for want of work to do.

In the morning he thought about his dinner, and the mayonnaise which the excellent housekeeper was preparing, which filled the air with an appetite—stimulating odour. The consumption of the mayonnaise occupied as much time as he could ex-

pend upon it, then he would sleep by his study fire; in the evenings he smoked relishingly, thus staving off the thought of his troubles and the recollection of his solitude.

And the curate sat at home, bearing the daily scourge of Grace's tongue. The winter passed slowly.

The Mornes returned to London for the opening of Parliament, but though Maycross was not a long journey from town Anna did not come to see her father; her letters always explained that she was very busy, and that Basil was working hard politically.

Sometimes the newspapers contained more news of Basil's doings than did his wife's letters home. There was a Ministerial Crisis, rumoured dissensions in the Cabinet,—Lord Illworth's secretary was an

important person. When the crisis was over, the public began to hear the truth of the matter,—some important Ministerial decision had been betrayed to the Opposition, it was unknown by whom. The new Radical paper, 'The Morning Invincible,' which had lately become the property of Purvis, had announced Cabinet secrets prematurely. As the Ministry was a Tory one this fact had created the crisis. There was doubt and dismay in the party,——who was the traitor?—or at least, who had been imprudent?

At last public opinion came to the concluson that Lord Illworth had been to blame. The garrulous, amiable, unsuspicious old man was too popular to be openly condemned, but the secret which had leaked out had been connected with his department.

Finally, 'The Morning Invincible' stated that it had learned from an indisputable source that Lord Illworth's secretary, Mr. Basil Morne, M.P., had dishonoured the confidence of his chief.

This news Grace Hedworth brought home to her brother one day, and he, loyally, refused to believe it.

'Of course it is true,' said Grace calmly. 'Why shouldn't it be? Mr. Morne is a conceited worldling, and an unbeliever. I have often wondered where he gets his money,—he must spend a great deal more than his salary;—no doubt he sells Government secrets to business men, and speculates himself upon the strength of them. As for his wife?—We shall see how she will behave now; perhaps her pride will be somewhat lessened.'

'Grace, Grace!—don't be uncharitable!'

'You may call me what names you please, brother. Anna deserved to be humbled. Mr. Morne's career is ruined, I conclude. Lord Illworth will discharge him, and no one will trust in his honour again.'

But Grace Hedworth's prediction was not verified. Mr. Morne wrote to 'The Times' complaining that a slanderous report had been circulated against him by 'The Morning Invincible,' and there the matter ended, so far as the world knew.

The rector was not troubled by the slander. Anna wrote to explain that Basil had been basely calumniated; her father answered in a short letter, expressing his regret that she had been worried, and sending his curate's sympathy.

Philip was strangely troubled by these events, Mr. Broughton thought.

'My daughter has chosen a worldly

life, Hedworth,' he said, 'and she must bear with its disagreeables. Her head was turned by social successes, or she would not have behaved so ill to you. However, you are too sensible to allow yourself to grow discontented with your lot, I trust.'

Philip felt that his rector did not understand him. How could he lay bare his sentiments to the cold eyes of a man who could see only the shallows of human nature? How could he speak of his sympathy for Anna, without owning to his own soul as well as to her father, that it was only by dint of effort and of prayer that he kept his thoughts of her free from any love that was not spiritually admissible?

He coloured beneath Mr. Broughton's critical gaze.

'I have never blamed her, sir; she was obliged to be true to her own heart.'

'She thinks her husband perfection,' said the rector, 'but her judgments are not infallible, you know. Morne seems to me the sort of man who would do anything for his ambition. Of course I hope she will never lose her admiration for him. Time will show, however.'

'Sir, don't speak as though you wished her to lose her romance.'

'I think nothing of romance, myself, Hedworth. I prefer reality.'

He was thinking with satisfaction that lunch was almost ready.

A day or two later Philip met Purvis in the village, and stopped to speak to him.

The captain was a successful man now, but not unwilling to patronise the curate.

'Ha, Hedworth, pleased to see you,' he cried jovially. 'How does the old humbug up at the rectory like the scandal about Morne? His family affairs haven't been satisfactory any way, since he turned his son out of his doors for fear my girl might want to enter 'em.'

'Surely there is no real foundation for the charge against Mr. Morne?'

Purvis winked.

'So his friends say, naturally enough. I wouldn't give a brass farthing for his character, myself, and maybe I know more than the rest of the world. Tell the parson he'd better have home Dick and my girl; then I might feel inclined to spare the feelings of the family honour, and not show up Morne's dodges.'

'I cannot deliver that message,' said

Philip, 'but I am constantly advocating Dick's claim. Unfortunately the profession he has chosen is not one of which Mr. Broughton would approve.'

'He's getting on, getting popular, only his health so confoundedly bad. I went to see him yesterday, found him in bed, —caught cold, he had, somehow, and was coughing like—like his mother. My little girl's no end proud of her baby.'

'Can I not persuade you to keep Morne's name out of your paper?'

Hedworth was desperately earnest.

'I know my business too well,—there'll be a general explosion someday, as you'll see, and Morne will be done for; it'll be a let down for the old parson. I'll only keep my own counsel on condition that my girl is treated fair. As for you, man, you haven't a spice of the devil in you;

you ought to be glad Mrs. Morne should come down in the world, considering the way she treated you.'

Philip showed his dignity by keeping silence. The two men parted.

The curate did not think his duty obliged him to repeat Purvis's words to his rector, but he himself worried over the thought of the threat. Evidently some plot was being prepared against Morne's political career, against his character; the question was whether Morne were guilty or innocent? Philip would not think him guilty.

CHAPTER XI.

'There is no doubt about it, marriage is a failure,' said Barbara to Miss Hilda.

The old-young woman was doing very fine needlework by the window, and the girl, whose mind was old, had been writing, but had turned away from her desk to utter this common-place opinion.

In the room there was little light, and what there was was of an unpleasant yellow tone; the afternoon had been fine, but evening was closing in with an early autumn fog.

Barbara looked as though she had been at work for hours; her face was weary, not too clean, her hair limp and untidy, her fingers had splashes of ink upon them, and her feet were slipping, as usual, out of worn shoes. There was a fire burning in the grate, and its one shaft of warmth had struck out across the polished floor towards Miss Hilda.

'Bab, my darling, I sincerely trust that you will alter that terrible opinion of matrimony. If my poor dear Albert had been able to come home before now, you would have seen what happiness he and I could find in that which you call a failure.'

A smile crossed the lined face. She still cherished the delusion that Albert (whose bones were dust) was on his way home to her love.

Barbara's shoulders made an impatient movement.

'If it isn't a failure, what is wrong between Basil and Anna? I made one of my wild sacrifices in that case, all for the sake of seeing the dear old boy happy, and now,—oh, there's nothing to be gained by blinking the fact,—there's something wrong somewhere; they're not confidential, they're both miserable. I suppose they're tired of one another! It is too absurd to suppose that she believes those odious libels against him!'

'My dearest, it is impossible!' cried Miss Hilda. 'Is not your brother the very soul of honour?'

'Of course. Political honour may be rare, but he has it. Why do you ask? as though you wanted re-assuring?'

'Love, I said it is impossible that Anna can distrust him.'

'Unless Anna's a fool!' cried Bab, bluntly. 'It's a horrid old world, and I wish I were dead, buried, and forgotten!'

'You will never be that, dearest.'

'Not while *you're* on earth or in heaven. There's no one else. I shan't achieve immortality for my writings. Basil's lost to me somehow; he has got into the mists where I can't follow him; and I can't care for his wife as I did once, because we play the hypocrite to each other, pretending not to see that he is gone from us. His ambition has lifted him from the level of our comprehension, I suppose; while as for Mr. Hambleton, he has deserted me.'

'My love, he came to see us before he left for Germany.'

'Yes, but he didn't propose. Oh, don't looked shocked—you know I mean him to ask me to marry him. Whether or not I accept him will depend on . . . circumstances, his own behaviour principally. All I know for certain is, that I'm a very unlucky girl! There, now don't speak again until tea-time; I'm going to screw out another chapter.'

Miss Hilda was generally the soul of obedience, but to-day she failed to obey. As the clock struck five she started up from her chair, with an exclamation of surprise.

There was a knock at the hall-door.

'My darling, here is Mr. Hedworth.'

'Hedworth!' said Barbara. 'Good heavens, the curate! What in the name of wonder does the man want here? He can't mean to evangelise us, can he?'

'Perhaps he imagines that dear Anna is with us.'

Bab drew her breath in a whisper.

'That can't be,—he must know her address. Ah, I guess!—he has read those wretched papers with the new hints against Basil's honour, and he's come to find out if they're true. Poor little man, I remember now, he is the jilted one. Well, he isn't dangerous, and he may do good. I'll send him to see Anna.'

'My love, hush, he is coming up the stairs.'

'Then the stair is honoured by his footsteps if he is an honest man,' said Barbara, laughing—adding, 'Honest men are very rare.'

Philip was shown into the room. Barbara went forward to greet him.

She had done nothing to smooth her

hair, and her fingers were still inky.

'You've come into a workshop,' she said, 'but you're very welcome, if you'll excuse the untidiness of the mechanic. You looked tired, what is the matter?'

The curate, surprised by her sudden and frank question, coloured as he answered,

'I have come up to town for the day; there is so much I have to do in the twelve hours.'

Miss Hilda beamed upon him shyly.

'You have not been to see us for a long time. Barbara, do you recollect how kind Mr. Hedworth was when he came on the last occasion, when he was obliged to bring us bad news?'

'About the illness of Anna's mother? Ah, her death was a happy release, but probably that could be said of most deaths; I know it could about mine. Mr. Hed-

worth, sit down by the fire. Tell us your news, then we'll relate ours.'

Barbara lit the gas; as it suddenly flared in the room, Philip glanced quickly around, seeing again the background against which Anna had stood on that former occasion of which Miss Hilda had spoken. Then he discovered that Barbara was shrewdly watching him, and he turned his eyes towards her again, and spoke about his rector.

Bab did not take much interest in Mr. Broughton, but she listened until, later, Philip mentioned Richard.

'Oh, you have got an opportunity to do a good deed, Mr. Hedworth. Richard's sister wants his address. Go and see her.'

'I hope Mrs. Morne is well?'

Miss Hilda had gone back to her sewing and her seat near the window; the sound

of her hand-movements was audible, but she could not hear the conversation when the speakers lowered their voices.

Barbara sank hers almost to a whisper.

'Mrs. Morne is well enough, but there's something troubling her, go and find out what it is. I speak frankly to you because I know that if she ever had a friend you are the man.'

'Can I do any good at all?'

'Of course you can. You want her to be happy; you set her free that she might marry my brother; Basil loves her, he is the best fellow living, and she loves him, yet there is something wrong between them now. I daren't speak to him or to her; a false word might make a lasting discord. Will you go and find out what is wrong, and help them? Follow up your one good deed by another.'

'God help me then!' said Hedworth; 'for the task you set me needs a wisdom I can't bring to it unaided.'

'You're the only person to do it. When you gave up Anna you meant her life to be a success; for the same meaning I sacrificed myself by giving Basil to her; I've lost my brother, and you lost Anna; are we going to stand tamely aside and watch their love going to shipwreck? Oh, it is too horrible!'

'Does not the trouble come through Mr. Morne's ambition? May he not have acted imprudently?'

'You'll suggest next that he has really betrayed his party!'

Philip looked down.

'You *can't* believe that!' cried Bab, her face pale with anxiety. 'He has many enemies, but you can't be one of them.'

'No, no, I am not,—indeed I am his friend.'

'Then persuade Anna to trust him,—if she needs persuading, which I cannot believe. But what is the use of telling you to do that?—if *you* don't trust him you can't make others do so!'

Philip wished that his confidence had not been shaken by Purvis's words; he had resolved not to believe Mr. Morne guilty, but the resolution was opposed to trust. Barbara, who was not easily impressed, felt painfully influenced by the curate's mingled sincerity and unbelief. She had often declared that honest men are rare, but she had none the less let her judgment depend upon her sympathies. Basil had been her hero, as he had been Anna's; now she was shocked to find that her own trust of him could falter.

'I will do my very best,' said Philip, gravely.

'Don't do anything. I am sorry I spoke to you about them. You can't understand the case properly, I was mad to think you would. You mean well, but you haven't known Basil's inmost heart as I have.—Here is tea coming—I am glad of the interruption, we might have quarrelled. Tell me about Maycross, of your children, of Richard and Mattie, or something simple; we'll leave hard problems to solve themselves—Fate, or Chance, or Providence!'

'Poor Dick! His health is no better.'

Miss Hilda had come forward to the hearth.

'And never will be,' said Barbara.

'Unless the doctors are wrong. His wife, poor little woman, has looked her trouble bravely in the face, and is ready

at all times to cheer him. Sometimes she must break down, but Dick never knows. If you saw her playing with her baby you would think she had no sorrow of any kind.'

'Does Dick know he'll never be better?'

Barbara's tone was awe-stricken.

'I told him this morning.'

'What a fearful task! but, of course, you clergymen are used to scenes of the sort.'

'If we are, we feel them none the less.'

'Don't your sensibilities get blunted after awhile?'

'I think people feel more as they grow older; those who do not learn to sympathise must surely have missed all life's best lessons.'

'I don't like lessons of any sort!' said Barbara, pouting.

'You must not believe her when she speaks slightingly of herself, Mr. Hedworth,' Miss Hilda cried. 'She is exceedingly sympathetic, and highly gifted!'

The subject of this eulogy looked up and laughed.

'Oh, I'm a paragon, of course.'

Philip's mind was full of Anna's concerns, meditating upon the news Bab had given him.

As soon as he could leave without seeming abrupt, he rose and said,

'Good-bye.'

Miss Hilda shyly begged him to repeat his visit. Barbara did not echo the invitation.

When he reached the narrow, dark

street where the Mornes lived, he saw that it was fashionable if not healthy, and guessed that a year's rent of their house would have purchased a villa in Maycross.

Mrs. Morne was at home.

He had not seen her since the day when he had breathed blessings over her, in the vestry of her father's church.

She would be much changed, he told himself. A footman preceded him upstairs, and through an ante-room. Suddenly, by the raising of a curtain, Philip found that he was in her presence.

The earthly nature of his love he had subdued, but its spiritual understanding was still great. He saw sorrow in her face. It was an instance of the strength of his forgetfulness that, though in her surprise at seeing him, she called him

'Philip,' he did not notice that she did so, nor feel pleasure at it.

Out of his mind he had tried to force every thought of self-pity, and, so successfully had he striven, that he could hold her hand to-day and say to himself,

'Her friendship is sweet. What have I ever done to merit such a blessing?'

His was a very simple nature.

Anna was less self-possessed. She could not forget that she had behaved badly to him; her penitence, which increased as her sympathy was enlarged by her own troubles, made her long to ask his forgiveness again. She was obliged to be careful with her words, or she would have done this impetuously, and the old wrong would only be added to by allusion, however well-meant.

After her first startled exclamation of

'Philip,' she recovered her presence of mind.

'You are good to have come,' she said, cordially, smiling her welcome. 'I was going to run down to Maycross, to surprise my father and you all,—but I have so little time? How is he?—and Grace? —and the dear children?'

'All well. The rector is stouter, his hair is whiter; that is all the alteration you will find in him, I think. His sermons are as excellent as ever.'

'My poor, dear old father!' said Mrs. Morne, wistfully. 'I was never good to him as I ought to have been. Now, I regret the wasted opportunities. Is he lonely? Oh, why will he not forgive Dick?'

'That will not come to pass, not while Mattie's father is living.'

'I am sorry; though Captain Purvis is my husband's enemy, I feel no anger against Mattie; she cannot prevent his conduct. You must have heard of our . . . anxieties, of the slanders, Mr. Hedworth?'

She spoke rapidly, with spirit. Her nervous air, half proud, half fearful, told Philip that she also had lost some of her confidence. She was trying to fight her husband's battle, but her courage failed her now and again, when she was harassed by an unadmitted doubt as to the justice of her course.

The effort of her championship was evident. It confirmed Hedworth's fears.

'I have read the papers, I have felt for you,' he said. 'I hope and pray that the trouble may pass away some day.'

'It must either pass, or . . . or grow worse,' she answered.

Her voice trembled. The expression her face had gained does not come to a woman unaccompanied by spiritual suffering; it had been left, in Anna's case, by a struggle between doubt and love.

'Not worse, I trust!' cried Philip. 'Slanders which are not confirmed by fact must die a natural death. I know politicians are dependent upon public appreciation, and small imprudencies are magnified by the eyes of their enemies, yet . . . Mr. Morne has you to influence him. Can you not warn him to be careful, to give no . . .'

He hesitated, alarmed by his own words. Would Anna resent them?'

For a moment he expected a rebuke, but she did not rebel against his advice. Instead, she smiled sadly at him as she answered,

'Ah, I remember that you always believed in the power of a woman's influence. So did I, once. Do you recollect how we nearly quarrelled about Tom Casson? You praised Kate for being true to him, I said it was her duty to give him up. You argued that love is a kind of sacrament, when it is of the sort that God's blessing can be asked upon it; therefore you said Kate owed Tom fidelity, just as though she were his wife. I did not . . .'

She paused, leaving a silence fraught with meaning.

Hedworth bent his head. He would not look in her face, for her secret was written there.

'You did not agree with me then,' he said, 'but you do now. You had not cared much for anyone then, while I had tested the possibilities of human affection,

many of them, at any rate. My wife, Rosa, gave up many things for my sake. I know that a woman may be happy when she has made great sacrifices for the sake of a faulty creature. Kate Ruggles is still faithful to Tom, I am glad to say; and he is really more steady than he used to be.'

'She will not choose her fate blindly; she knows the worst evil she has to expect.'

'Reality is often worse than expectation believed. Her love is sure to be tried; if it is worthy it will endure, even if it does not strengthen with the need for it. Poor Tom will never become a sober man if she deserts him.'

'You don't seem to make any allowance for the power of Providence,' cried Anna.

'I may be wrong; I spoke so because I believe that God often chooses a woman as His instrument, leaving her the responsibility of doing her work or neglecting it. And I did not say that without Kate's help Tom cannot reach heaven; a thief has surely entered there, so why not a drunkard?'

'I have lived in the world long enough to know that it does not share your opinion, Mr. Hedworth,—it teaches that all bad characters should be punished and avoided, not helped.'

'It does not understand love divine and human,' answered the curate.

Anna sighed.

'Have you seen Dick to-day?'

'Yes; and his wife, and the baby.'

'What is its name?'

'Philip.'

'After you? I am glad. You have been Dick's true friend.'

'Why don't you go to see him, Mrs. Morne?'

'Would they like me to go?'

'Yes, but Dick believes that you will refuse to when you know his profession.'

'What has he been doing?'

'He is a music-hall singer, a comedian, I think he calls himself. Just now he is too ill to work.'

'The poor old boy!—I will go. Could he do nothing else?'

'It is a paying profession; though he has been ill for sometime, they have not spent their savings.'

'I will go,' she repeated, 'and try to make up to them for the past. I was never cordial to Mattie, and Dick was angry

with me because . . . . I married Basil.'

Dick's anger had been on behalf of his friend. Hedworth accepted this fact frankly. While Anna feared a subject of conversation and took infinite trouble to avoid it, the curate, strong in his simplicity of motive, spoke out, making her feel that, by trying to spare, she had wronged him.

'I have explained all that to Dick, Mrs. Morne; he needed to be convinced that his affection for you and his kind friendship for me were in no danger of clashing. Young fellows will be foolish. He said he could not help taking my part; I told him there was no part to take. He wishes you to be exceedingly happy; you know, I trust, how earnestly I echo the wish.'

'Yes,' said Anna, rising as Philip had risen; 'I do know. Must you go so soon? I am sorry.'

She came out to the doorway, and there gave him her hand. As she stood, leaning against the portière-curtains, grasping the velvet folds, she looked strangely pale.

'Good-bye, Mr. Hedworth. Give my love to my father, and to Trot and Jerry.'

'Good-bye,' said Philip. 'I hope you will soon come to Maycross.'

As he crossed the hall he looked back with a smile. Anna still stood in the doorway of the drawing-room.

Near her, on the landing, was a marble statue of Melancholy. Seeing the two faces, one stone the other living flesh, one after the other in his swift glance, he thought, with a stab of pain, that the latter was the more sorrowful.

CHAPTER XI.

When Philip Hedworth was gone Anna went back to her chair by the hearth, and sat there alone, motionless, watching the fire, until the autumn afternoon became evening, and the flame-light alone kept darkness at bay. She would not have the gas lighted, she would not go to dress for dinner, for Basil was out; if he returned for the meal he would bring no friends with him. She felt that all the small duties of her life had become unnecessary, that routine would soon be impossible.—

Yet she told herself that nothing was changed since yesterday, no event had occurred to-day but the curate's visit. That unimportant occurrence had made her think of her old life, that was all.

Since the old days she had learned to blush for wrongs she had not done; she had found out the shame of the man she had chosen to love and trust, to whom she had voluntarily bound herself, who had been her hero. Her own nature was essentially honest; faults she had, but the sin of self-deception was one she could not commit easily; she had tried hard to blind her own eyes, but they saw clearly. She could not force herself to live in a fool's paradise of incredulity; she knew that the thing she loathed was true.

Sitting there by the fire, waiting for Basil's return, Anna made up her mind to

plead with him. She saw that the future could bring her no joy, no peace, unless she could regain her old power over him. She would make a great effort. There would have to be a contest between two wills, both of them strong and determined.

Then she began to consider the alternatives of victory or failure. If she won, the rest of her life would offer no more such critical moments;—victors are easily courageous; her strength having once been proved would endure, sufficient for all calls upon it. If she lost——

Anna clasped her hands round her knees, and, crouching forward, gazed into the fire with eyes which looked as though they saw her own soul in agony. Failure in this one effort would mean failure of her whole life, she was thinking; and the man whom she had once called her deliverer

would be the cause of her defeat. She would go home to live, back to Maycross, to her father, to face the light of day with an impenetrable calmness of demeanour, to defy the curiosity of gossips. If there were moments, and no doubt there would be, when she would be utterly unable to repress grief, why then she would shut herself up in her own room—the little room where so much of her girlhood had been passed—between the walls of which she had dreamed the dreams of childhood and of maidenhood; and there, where no eyes could reach, she would pay by tears for the folly of having trusted not wisely, but too well. Only a few minutes these should be, she decided, for her pride should keep her calm usually.

And Basil?——

She loved him still; she believed that

some day he would yield, repent, and call her back. This would be victory in another guise, bnt the victory which would only come through public disgrace. Without a cause Basil would not yield, if he refused now.

Without crying she thought out all these possibilities, and hardened her heart that she might play without flinching the part she had set herself. Though she loved still, she could not stay to share the fortunes which were dependent upon dishonour. That she should leave Basil, if he would not give up his 'ambition,' seemed an inexorable duty, as well as a sacrifice necessary to her pride. He, by falling so low, had wounded her proud spirit until it rose up in self-defence.

Basil came home late for dinner. He was in high spirits; Lord Illworth had been

speaking of the post he would be given when a suitable vacancy occurred.

He went into the drawing-room.

'Well, Nan, my dear? I'm sorry to have made you wait, but Illworth kept me talking—I couldn't get away earlier . . . What is it? Something wrong?'

For Anna had clasped him about the neck with her arms, and, with her face hidden on his shoulder, was sobbing passionately.

With the sight of his face smiling at her as of old, her self-control had failed. She saw before her the man she had reverenced, and sorely missed her pride in him. Never again could she feel proud because he had cared to win her, because he had told her that she might become a grand creature. Of late Basil had preferred to study ignoble things, instead of bringing his acumen to

bear upon the psychological development of her character.

'Nan, Nan,' he remonstrated, 'don't make a scene without explaining what is wrong.'

As soon as she could she raised her face and looked him in the eyes. Then he was amazed to see that, in spite of her sobs, she had shed no tears. She was gazing at him with pity, reproach, condemnation.

'I used to think you so noble!'

'My dear, all nobility is comparative.'

'Don't jest,' she said. 'I am going to plead with you for the truth. I am your wife, let me understand your point of view, your . . . work . . . Are you ever in earnest? when you are most eloquent are you always a hypocrite?'

'Of course not, Nan, only as much a

hypocrite as a political man must be. Politics constitute one great gamble. You're a Tory, I fight well for the Tories; what more do you want?'

'Yet you sold Tory secrets to . . . someone.'

'You put the matter coarsely: women cannot understand business.'

'Tell me how I am wrong.'

'You believe that I let Purvis's paper get hold of Cabinet secrets. Foolish little woman! On the contrary, nothing annoyed me more than that affair.'

'You owned to me then that you had a way of making capital out of your knowledge.'

'Yes, but not in a way calculated to benefit the Opposition. Reuben Drive manages his speculations by the knowledge of coming events I obtain for him,

that is all:—I owe him money, Nan, it's the only way I can get out of his debt.'

'We might live upon much less than we do; you could pay him back so much out of your salary.'

'My dear, you don't understand yet. I can't leave Drive in the lurch,—in a year or two his will be one of the soundest Companies in the kingdom; I shall reap benefit. You know I'm ambitious, and political success needs a fortune to back it. There is no danger for me now,—that affair a little while ago was an accident, it occurred through a clerk Drive had foolishly trusted,—the fellow was in need of money suddenly, so sold the secret to Purvis. Even then I suffered no permanent injury. All the world believes that Drive and I quarrelled years ago, aren't even on speaking terms.'

'You are using edged tools carelessly.'

'No, carefully, Nan,—it is worth my while.'

He was glad in his own mind that she was taking the affair so quietly; that the worst of the scene seemed to be over. Often he had foreseen this explanation, but he had never thought that she would speak so quietly.

'It is worth your while,' she repeated slowly, 'that means that we are living upon money gained in that way. Tell me, does Drive's knowledge never injure the Government . . . financially, I mean?—Of course I am very ignorant, but it seems to me that must happen.'

'The Government pays me a little better than it means to do.'

'Because, Basil, I cannot go on living upon that dishonestly-gained money. I

know enough to be sure that, if this were proved against you, you would be "hounded out of public life," as the papers say you should be.'

'Don't be disagreeable, Nan. You are my wife, and must share my lot, but you needn't fear *that* future. I promise to let you know in good time if I ever see it coming, then you can desert me in my ruin.'

'I must desert you now if you will not grant my request. Dearest, I love you, but I *can't* share dishonour as I *would* share disgrace. Give up Drive, have nothing to do with his speculations. I can manage to keep house upon very little a week, —you could still work politically, your salary will be increased some day,—we should be happy without going into society, we should be together. Let all

your ambitions be true ones, don't try to be rich, be content to be great and useful: —oh, my darling, hear me,—for you are very dear to me.'

The man she loved was no longer her hero; she had once bestowed on him a reverential faith; but because the love was grown-up, and the faith had been but a childish passion, her bitter lesson of disenchantment had not lessened the warmth of her feeling for him.

He was losing his temper. That the appeal of her eyes and words was difficult to refuse, vexed him.

'You make an effective religious heroine, Nan, but don't try to play the part to me.'

'I am not acting. You've deceived me, you've made me ashamed so that I can't look people in the face. What would my

father say if he knew all I know, that the "slanders" are not slanders at all, but truths? It all sounds very simple, very silly to you, but to me death or beggary would be so much easier to bear. And I cannot *make* you understand. You are not the man I thought you.'

'Nan, Nan, no more nonsense! I am tired, and want my dinner.'

'You will not refuse to answer me? I have a last few words to say.'

'Be quick then; last words are usually odious, those of women particularly.'

She drew her breath quickly, subduing a sob, and spoke, grasping his arm with her trembling hands.

'We have been very fond of each other, very happy, we may be happy still if you will let us. I suppose all lives have a crisis;—this is ours. You shall never be

reproached for what is over, it shall be forgotten: let us take up our happiness where we lost it. Give up this degrading money-making.'

There was beauty in her emotional face. Unconscious of any effect she was producing by such means, her grace was perfect as she stood with hands outstretched in supplication.

The man was not unmoved, but he was neither convinced nor influenced in regard to action. He regretted her point of view only.

'I wish you were not a clergyman's daughter, Nan.'

'You refuse me?'

'Bluntly—yes.'

'I shall go back to my father.'

Startled and angered, his determination became firmer under threats.

'You shall not!'

'You cannot prevent my going; you dare not. In one way you can keep me with you, but you refuse. You won't make the sacrifice for my sake.'

She bowed her head to hide the tears which flooded her eyes.

'You have no right to ask it of me. I have always been good to you. This is *my* last word, Nan; I will do anything else for you, but not that. I delivered you from an existence which was narrow and wretched; you show your gratitude by deserting me to go back to it. You will be out of your element, you will be miserable, you will come to me again.'

She drew her hands from his arm, and turned towards the door. At the threshold she paused to look back at the room, and at Basil standing by the hearth.

'I will come back when you are honest again,' she said, 'or when you are ill, ruined, or dying.'

CHAPTER XII.

The Maycross people all said that Anna's marriage must have proved a failure, but it was a failure by which their rector benefited. At first he had rebelled against Anna's home-coming. She had behaved foolishly, he said, in the past, and she could not make up to him for that by any present affection. Besides, he had got into a groove of inaction from which it was painful to be roused; the excellent housekeeper's savoury dishes almost compensated him for having parted with his daughter.

The rector had felt that Anna had gone far from him, into another world of which he knew very little, and had thought of her, in her new position of Basil's wife, as almost as great a stranger as was Basil himself. The early days of her return had been uncomfortable; Anna had tried to hide her own sorrow from her father, he had endeavoured to entertain her as though she had been a mere guest. Gradually the unnaturalness of their mutual mistrust had become apparent to them both; Anna had shed a few tears one evening, he had tried to comfort her. Next morning he had shown her his weekly bills, confiding his own most pressing grief to her,—his extravagantly managed household was ruining him; then her womanly interest had been touched, she had taken command of the rectory.

Trifles had brought them together; some day they would speak freely to each other of large troubles.

In the mornings Anna would perform her housewifely duties, and sit in the library while the rector wrote out his sermon for Sunday, an occupation which was stretched over many week-days; in the afternoon he would sleep a little, waking to find her ready to read to him; at this time of his life he began to take pleasure in the newspapers; their evenings were given up to recreation, music, chess, cards, and literature as well as conversation. He brightened wonderfully as the days passed.

But when two months were nearly over and he was able to say to himself that he was happy and had much for which to be grateful, his intellect had sharpened, so that he was not contented with his ignor-

ance of the cause of the quarrel between Anna and Basil. He wanted to know all about it.

'When I have grown dependent upon her she will go back to her husband,' he thought bitterly.

This fear made his conduct towards her changeable; sometimes he tried hard to be morose and unsociable, to wean himself from longing for her company.

It was a November evening when the crisis of the affair took place. Father and daughter were in the garden, making a slow tour of the paths, deciding what bulbs were to be planted in the flower-beds for spring. It all looked very desolate now.

The garden was the only place where Anna walked; she had not even been to church since her return, though she had

been conscious, and her father had told her, that she would give scandal. She shrank from the publicity of the village green on a Sunday. The privacy of the old garden made it her favourite refuge.

To-night the gloom of dusk was lessened by early starlight. Anna's arm was in her father's; he was smoking, and was well wrapped up.

'How dreary it all is!' she said. 'Why, we used to pride ourselves upon our flowers. Next year I must see that it is made bright again.'

'Next year, Anna? I was thinking that there will be no one to care for flowers when you are gone.'

'I am not going. I think I shall live here always now. You aren't tired of having me, are you?'

'No, my child; I don't want you to go; but there is your duty to be considered!'

Stern was the rector's tone; he had braced his will to the performance of that which he knew was *his* duty, to counsel his daughter to return to her husband.

'I cannot go back to Basil unless he sends for me, unless he grants a request I have made him. I feel like a widow; he is dead to me for the present. Father, I believe you ought to know the truth about our quarrel.'

The rector thought so too, and the tale was told. As they paced up and down the leafless avenue, poor Anna laid bare the sorrow which had blighted her married life. Speaking was a relief to her. The knowledge was sweet that someone understood. That someone became at once of

supreme importance to her; he was enriched by her confidence.

And he? Good man, he blamed himself conscientiously because he was not more grieved, but his mind was too weak and weary to grasp many facts at a time, and the principal point of the story that he did understand was that Anna could not go away and leave him, not unless an unlikely event happened. Of course he was shocked.

'Poor child, my dear daughter!' he exclaimed. 'What a pity you did not take my advice! You will remember that I always warned you against those worldlings, I entreated you not to allow their influence to harm you. Now you see that I was right; if you had been more careful you would not have given yourself to a man for whom you can have no respect.'

Basil was little more than a name to Anna's father. Between the natures of the two men there had always been a great gulf.

Anna thought to herself that even now, looking back, she could not force herself to wish that she had chosen Philip Hedworth before Basil Morne, or that she had stayed in her old home, keeping all her old prejudices and ignorance. No, the step had been taken, it had brought her misery, but she could not regret it. There was one invincible reason, which commanded recognition of heart and brain—Basil was no longer her hero, it was true she could have no respect for him, yet——

'Father, I love him!' she said, tremulously.

The rector shook his head; this was

an incredible weakness of his daughter's!

'He will probably go from bad to worse,' he answered. 'Dear me, it is very sad to hear of such things! Try to forget him, my dear child, put him out of your heart. Some day he will be disgraced, but, fortunately, no one will be able to impute blame to you. There is no reason why we should not be exceedingly happy together, you and I, if you will cease to remember that this man ever came between us.'

Anna looked at her father tenderly. A little while ago she would have disliked the involuntary selfishness which he displayed, but she was not intolerant now of any human weakness. Seeing him as an old lonely widower, she loved him fondly, wished for his comfort, was able to make sacrifices for his sake. That she was dear

to him she knew, that he clung to her companionship, and would cling yet more to it as his feebleness increased. How could she force him to comprehend her own grief, heart-deep though it was? No, no—she would not be cruel because she was sad. She, who was tasting the cup of sorrow, knew its bitterness, and would not hold it to his lips.

To him Basil was only a name; to her Basil was one who was loved,—a fallen star;—that was the difference.

'We will be very busy, father,' she said, driving back the sob which had risen in her throat. 'I will help you to write your sermons, and you shall teach me to . . . to be brave. I must go out and face the people who were my friends before I was married. And, oh, there is one

favour I want to ask of you . . . . !'

'It has often grieved me to refuse your requests, Anna; I will try to grant this one.'

'Forgive Dick and Mattie. Remember, dear, Dick has not done wrong, and Mattie, poor little soul, must be in real distress. If Dick dies young, and you have not pardoned him, I think mother will know and will be sorry. And Dick's baby, the tiny boy,—wouldn't you like to see him, to watch him grow up out of infancy? Dick is very ill; the doctors think that he will never be much better.'

The rector did not answer; his face looked troubled, he was trying to make up his mind.

There was a gate set in the wall of the garden, and he opened this, leading Anna

out upon the Green, where she had not been for many days.

There the starlight was quite brilliant, though the night was too far advanced for people to be walking out of the village. The two kept on, side by side, Anna waiting for a reply, afraid to spoil the effect of her words by adding to them,—the rector, with his head bent, less erect of figure than he had been, thinking of the son he had dismissed, and of that son's son. They reached the churchyard, where there were many shadows, which lay, like mourners who had fallen asleep, beside the grassy grave-mounds and the monumental stones.

Mr. Broughton led the way to his wife's resting-place. The lime boughs, naked twigs and branches, swayed in the wind, creaking and snapping; no bird was abroad singing, and the place looked desolate.

He stood by the marble cross, his eyes read the inscription he knew so well. His daughter fell on her knees, and clasped her hands, as a child does, in prayer.

'She always trusted Dick,' said the rector, huskily. 'I used to tell her that she trusted everyone too much. Well,—I don't know . . . . I don't know . . . . . Only God knows . . . .'

Anna answered in a whisper,

'Once I found her crying, because she said she would not live to see Dick's children . . . . Father, let me love Dick's child, for her sake.'

'But the mother . . . .'

'Mattie has been good to Richard. Think of her trial, then you will not feel angry with her. She knows that Dick whom she loves is dangerously ill, may

not long be spared to her,—just as we knew about mother.'

'Blessed are the pure in heart,' murmured the rector, reading from the tombstone.

'Father,—I . . . . I used to be very prejudiced and ignorant. I hated the idea of having Mattie for a sister, but now I want her. We may be able to help each other. You shall love the child, I will love her,—we will both care for Dick. Don't you think human pride will look very ignoble when we are dying, and when we have to remember how many times we have been ruled by it? Oh, let us be good to people now,—there is so little time in life, and Love is the great lesson!'

'You shall do as you wish, my dear.'

'I may write to Dick and Mattie? I may ask them to come here?'

'Now that I am getting old I do not want to be asked so many questions. You decide as you please.—Now, Anna, we will return to the house.'

Anna did not thank him; she knew that would spoil all. Kneeling by her mother's grave, she buried her face in her fingers, sobbing,—not for that dead mother, but for the memory of an evening when Basil Morne had stood beside her in this place, had stretched out his hands across the grass mound, asking for her love.—She had given him all.—Now she could not take one half of the gift back. For better for worse, for the dreary present as for the future which might be more dreary, he was her beloved. The more difference between his soul and hers, the greater the depth over which her love must bridge, the more her womanhood would respond,

growing in strength of endurance and capability.

It was her turn now to stretch out her hands and entreat. He was at a distance, but she resolved that her cry should be made to reach him once again.

The rector tapped his stick impatiently on the ground as he waited. Anna's low sobbing brought moisture into his eyes, and he was afraid of losing his self-control. The only way he could think to help her was by the utterance of a platitude.

'You should not mourn with bitterness, my child, for a soul which we may humbly believe to be with its Saviour.'

Anna had been sobbing for a soul which denied the Saviour.

The impenetrable narrowness of the mind of the old man saved him from much

sorrow; the grief of others never reached his intellect; he sympathised out of a sense of duty rather than through responsive sentiment.

Anna did not wish to make him understand.

'Father, now she is dead we will try to do the work in the world she would have done,' was her answer, as she rose. 'Oh, let us keep Mattie from ever feeling lonely; life is so full of desolation.'

'I am not certain that, from a Christian's point of view, there is not something wrong about your opinion, Anna.'

'Love is God's gift; He must have meant us to feel desolate for want of human affection.'

'In order that we may turn to Him.'

'And learn to help others.'

They retraced their steps to the garden,

where they met Philip Hedworth. Since Anna's return she had seen him occasionally, without there being any evidence of deep friendship in their intercourse. He had feared to speak openly of her trouble; she did not believe that he knew it.

To-night this awkwardness was to be remedied.

'Mr. Hedworth,' she said, meeting his eyes with a gaze of reliance, 'I want you to help me with your advice. My father has consented to ask Dick and Mattie to come here.'

Mr. Broughton turned to his curate.

'My daughter's wishes naturally have great weight with me, now especially. This is her arrangement; I merely consent to it.'

Philip thought of the time when he had

pleaded for Dick, and had been answered by a curt 'Good-night, Hedworth.' Not being a man who bore malice for past injuries, he replied cordially,

'Your consent is a great deal, sir. I am rejoiced at it, for Dick's sake.'

'Anna, my dear, I will go indoors. You and Hedworth had better discuss the affair.'

When the old man had gone, Mrs. Morne said, gently,

'He is almost ashamed of his own goodness.'

'His is a wonderful character!' cried the curate.

'Shall I write to Dick and Mattie, or will you go to town to-morrow and fetch them all down to us? That is what would be best. I hoped you would agree.'

'With all my heart,' was the fervent response. 'And may I say one word to you before we follow the rector indoors?'

'Anything you wish.'

'It is a mere humble word of praise and gratitude, for it is you who have done this good deed. If the dead could come again to earth . . . but they can see from heaven, after all there is no need for regret . . . Your work must be praised by lips whose words you cannot hear . . . God bless you, Mrs. Morne.'

Anna was amazed.

'I have done so little.'

'But enough; no one can do more. Poor Dick! He will think you have done much!'

'Perhaps I have learned much,' said Anna, 'but I have done scarcely anything.'

'Out of your sorrow you have gained new feelings. Don't you know that a woman who has suffered is capable of doing work which she could not have performed well before? It is because I know you are very capable that I blame you for shirking a work which would be very painful.'

Anna had not been prepared for this turn of the conversation. Philip, the meek, gentle little man, who had always admired her, had become her judge, dared to declare that he disapproved of her conduct, accused her of cowardice.

She was opening her lips in self-defence, was about to reproach him for his presumption by showing that she felt injured by his adverse opinion, when she read in his face more penitence than her pride had wished him to feel. His misery of remorse

was worse to bear than was her wound to vanity.

'I . . . I was going to be angry . . . forgive me,' she said. 'You would not speak like this if you did not mean me well.'

'To refuse to hear me is within your right, Mrs. Morne,' he went on. 'You may naturally say to yourself, "What excuse can this man have for criticising my actions at all?" You may decide that I am presuming upon a long friendship. No, I won't be hypocritical, I will say, presuming upon my former love for you, upon the fact that for a little while you fancied that you cared for me. What has been can't be undone; and, as you were mistaken then, there is no harm in my bringing that past back to your memory. May I go on? May I speak frankly to

you, because you were once betrothed to me?'

They had walked back to the house within the light from the drawing-room window. Anna sank into a chair which stood in a shadowed corner of the verandah, but the curate stood, leaning against the trellis, where she could see every line upon his face. He was changed. The strength which, as he had told her, comes only through suffering, had given him more expression of feature and eyes, more power of word-expression also.

'Go on,' she said, whispering.

After a silence he obeyed.

'Eloquence would help me, but I was always awkward. I am afraid of hurting you. Because of that awkwardness I am able to say nothing forcibly without mentioning myself, which is a pity. Perhaps

I can best impress you by asking a favour, pleading with you for a personal boon . . . I made a sacrifice for you once; Mrs. Morne, don't let me feel that it was quite useless.'

A year or so ago she would have disliked the apparent egotism of the appeal; now she could hear in it the unselfishness of a nature which did not shrink from seeming selfish.

'What can I do?' she asked, tremulously. 'Are you not judging without a full knowledge of the case? Would you have me countenance dishonour?'

'You took an extreme step when you deserted the man who did wrong. If *you* cannot influence him no one can. He is dear to you, yet you have given him up; despaired of him as it were, at the very time when, by degrees, you might have

drawn him from wrong-doing. What would become of us if God gave us up?'

'You would have me *share* dishonour?'

'Don't you think that God often shares dishonour, or lets it seem that he does? Aren't there many men and women who profess to believe in God, who are "religious," yet dishonour Him hourly because of their weakness under trial? Yet He never gives them up, He deserts no one who cares for Him.'

'My husband chose—he would not grant my request, he let me go away.'

'He needs you. If he were stricken down with fever you would go to him, you would not fear contagion. Mrs. Morne, you may be morally afraid, your pride cries out in dread, but your right place is with your husband, no matter what disgrace he may suffer. Think, if your love can conquer,

what is your responsibility for refusing to try?'

Hedworth's voice was hoarse, broken, but not hesitating. His words carried conviction to Anna's heart, because they appealed to her love.

'I begin to see that I am a coward,' she said, under her breath. 'Poor Kate Ruggles has the courage to be true to Tom, while I . . . I am only true to my pride! I . . . I was going to write to Basil.'

'Do more than write; go to him. To-morrow you will be here to receive Dick and Mattie, but next day——'

'I will go. Thank you for speaking to me to-night, you . . . you have made a second sacrifice for me; I recognise that.'

'It is for me to thank you, for your patience. Most women would not have listened. I was terribly afraid. Will

you still let me call myself your friend?'

'A friend before all others! Philip, neither of these sacrifices shall be useless.'

'Thank God!' he said.

And, with a clasp of the hands, they parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next morning was sunny, the white rime on the grass glittered beautifully. Maycross folk rose early; even at the rectory the breakfast hour was eight o'clock.

Father and daughter greeted one another without mentioning the concession he had made last night, or the event which the day was to bring about. The constraint of the conqueror who loves the conquered was upon Anna, keeping her quiet; she would not show triumph.

In the breakfast-room were two old portraits, one of Anna's mother, the other of Dick as a chubby, impertinent-faced boy. Anna's eyes were often upon these portraits, which faced her as she sat at table, and once she found that the rector was also gazing at them. This unacknowledged communion of thought made the old man unusually gentle in manner.

Anna's household duties were pleasant this morning; she saw that the spare bedroom was got ready, and ordered a dinner that would be likely to tempt an invalid. Several times she went upstairs to see into which room the sun shone best, for there would have to be a nursery for Dick's baby son.

After lunch, time seemed to pass very slowly. The rector pretended to doze in his easy-chair, but his thoughts did not

slumber; he merely closed his eyes out of respect for custom, and because he was anxious not to appear excited. All the while he was planning speeches of welcome for prodigal Richard, who was coming home not in the least repentant; then he would try to invent severe sentences to speak to Mattie. She had been most to blame, he was certain, she had schemed to catch Dick, foolish fellow. Undoubtedly Dick seemed to be happy. And then there was little Philip. When the rector thought of the baby he could not be sincerely angry with Mattie.

His latest plan was not much unlike the one he had been obliged to give up. His vision of the rectory as a happy home was to be fulfilled in reality; there would be children's voices, or the prattle of one child at least; there would be a woman to

manage the house, a man to talk to, or play chess with, in the evenings. Hedworth was to be replaced by Dick.

The knowledge that Dick was seriously ill did not affect the rector's plan, because he knew that he himself was growing feeble,—there were not many years to be planned for. And he had always considered his own feelings; he could not see the harm of well-meaning self-love, particularly not when it prevented him from grieving too much over Richard's illness. He and Dick would learn to understand one another, he resolved, before it was too late,—they would probably live and die nearly together,—and Mattie, who was to be forgiven for Dick's sake, would have her baby to comfort her for the loss of Dick.

The old man by the chimney-corner, sitting with closed eyes, thought he saw

clearly into his own future, and did not blame himself because he considered it of supreme consequence.

Anna knew the train by which Philip Hedworth would persuade Dick and Mattie to travel, and had made up her mind to go to the station to welcome them.

As she had not walked through the village since the night when, under cover of the friendly darkness, she had stolen home, an ordeal was before her, one from which her feelings recoiled. But for her new resolutions she would have shirked the publicity of meeting her brother and his wife at the station. She kept on telling herself that she must be selfish no longer, and to show her little world that Dick and Mattie were freely pardoned was the sacrifice she was called upon to make.

Compared with Philip Hedworth's sacrifice it was a small affair indeed.

Not since the days when she had tried to make herself fair in Basil's eyes, that he might think his wife did credit to his choice, had she given as much care to dressing as she gave now, preparing for her walk.

Above the dark fur which encircled her throat her face looked out gravely: there was a depth of tenderness in her gray eyes, a wistful smile curved her lips. All the while, as she trod the familiar road, she was recalling those incidents of her life which were most dear to her;—here, by the corner of the lane, she had often paused to speak with Philip,—once, she remembered, he had spoken in defence of Kate Ruggles' devotion to Tom Casson.

The unimportant occurrence of that conversation had become a pleasing memory, for now Anna understood the wisdom which had prompted the curate's simple words. 'Love has the power to idealise; thank God that it is so,' he had said. Here, on the verge of the town, had stood the school-children to wave her their farewells when she had left Maycross on her wedding-day. Looking back, she had said good-bye to her old home, rejoicing in the knowledge that Basil was delivering her from that which she had called 'a narrow existence.'—Ah! she had been glad to come back as to a refuge! She would never hate the place again, yet she would go away to-morrow, rejoicing once more, because she would go to him whom she loved beyond any other human being. Faulty, ungrateful, in many ways unprincipled as he was, Basil Morne

would never lose his wife's devotion.

At the Ruggles' shop she stopped, went in, and held out her hand to Kate, who was, as usual, sewing behind the counter.

The girl sprang up in astonishment.

'Oh, Miss Anna—ma'am, I mean—I hope I see you well?'

'Yes. And you? And your mother and Tom? Mr. Hedworth tells me you are to be married next spring. Will you let me congratulate you now, dear, in case I am not home before then? for I am going to London to-morrow.'

'We're all lively as crickets, thank you kindly,' Kate answered cheerfully. 'Yes, Tom and I have agreed not to wait any longer before getting a home of our own; as I tell him, the older mother gets the less she'll feel like sparing me, so it may

as well be got over now, and the sooner I begin to keep him out of the public-houses the better. Tom's a good fellow, ma'am, he means well, but he's not got a strong mind. Now I have, thank the Lord, so we ought to get on well in partnership. You used not to approve of my marrying Tom, but I couldn't fancy anyone else. It don't seem to make any difference whether a man's good enough for one or not, if one cares about him one seems to love him all the more because of his failings.'

'You are philosophical I know, Kate. I hope you may be very happy; I think you will be, for you are starting your new life unselfishly. Give my remembrance to Tom; he is a lucky fellow. Now I must go,—but I want to tell you my news—my brother and his wife are coming here, to the Rectory, to-day.

I know Mattie was always your friend.'

Before voluble Kate had time to express her surprise, joy, and curiosity, Mrs. Morne was many yards down the High Street.

She went on her way smiling, feeling charitable towards everyone. There was the library, the large window of the room where that Mutual Improvement Class had met which was now under Grace Hedworth's management, and had declined in popularity. She met the postman, an old protégé of hers, who gave her two letters, one for herself from Barbara,—the other was addressed in strange writing to her father. This she put away in her pocket; Barbara's letter she read while she paced up and down the station platform.

As Anna understood Barbara's communication she became very glad.

'13, Sandhurst Street.

'My dear old Girl,

'Let bygones be bygones. We've had a bit of a tiff lately, you and I, but we won't remember it. Basil came to see me yesterday, and wouldn't let me blame you. He said you were wise, that events are proving your wisdom. I wanted him to explain the whole business, but he wouldn't; only I can see without being told that he is wretched without you. Can't you shorten up your visit home? The old boy has lost all his self-assertiveness. Either he thinks something dreadful is going to happen, or he wants all the world to see how miserable he is when you're away. He works harder than ever politically. Now I'm going to rave to you about my own happiness: I always was a selfish little beast. I've given up for ever my attempts

to become famous and wealthy, and am going to be a model wife instead. My heart is warm within me. No doubt you must often have believed that my being was deficient in any such organ, but, Nan, dear, you were mistaken. I've been astonished by my own heart of late. Of course you will guess what has happened—Lynn Hambleton has come back and has asked me to marry him. Shall I tell you how I answered? No, I won't; at any rate he didn't mind the reply. For the future he will try to elevate me intellectually, which will be a harder task than elevating the masses. The other day I read him the beginning chapters of the goody-goody novel you helped me to write, and, as he thinks it's promising, I shall get up every morning at five to finish it. We shall be dreadfully poor, but as Lynn doesn't mind

I don't see why I should. As most of his friends live in the slums I shan't want fashionable clothes for visiting. By the bye, I am sure now of Lynn's honesty; before I accepted him I demanded that he should at once invest his savings—twopence farthing!—in music-hall shares; and the dear man refused! I have begun to study political economy and John Stuart Mill.

'Miss Hilda, poor old dear, is as serenely benevolent as ever. She has made me promise to have her as bridesmaid, unless Albert comes back suddenly and she is married first. Mine will be a queer wedding, I guess. The church will be crammed with dock-labourers, flower-girls, costers, and other people less presentable; my elderly Ophelia will wear pale blue and scatter flowers, and Lynn's coat . . . No,

there will be nothing absurd in *his* appearance; he might dress in corduroy or sacking, he would always look what he is, the finest gentleman in Europe.

'I can't write any more, for I've learned to value time, so good-bye, my Nan. I want to see you; above all I want you to come back to the poor old boy.

'Your ever loving and reformed

'BAB.'

Anna's eyes swam with tears of joy. Suddenly she heard her name called; while she had been reading, the train had come in.

'Anna, old girl!'

'*Dick!*'

The pale young fellow stood before her, leaning heavily on a thick stick; by his side, Mattie, pretty as ever, was holding

up her child to greet Richard's sister. She felt that she could best defend her conduct in marrying him, by offering to Anna, as peace-maker, the baby-kisses of the present she had made the Broughton family.

'Miss Anna,' now Mrs. Morne, still awed Mattie just a little.

But Dick had no fears; he had accepted his recall home as the end of all dissension, neither feeling anxious for, nor expecting forgiveness, nor desiring to forgive.

'The little chap's grinning at you, Nan. Isn't he the image of his mother? Mattie, I know Anna's going to make a jolly aunt for him.'

The women kissed each other, Mattie blushing, Anna grave.

'Welcome, dear.'

'It's splendid to come back!' cried Dick. 'The old place looks quite different.'

'Mrs. Morne, I will help Dick along, if you will take baby. I haven't brought my nurse; I thought I could find one in Maycross.'

Mrs. Richard Broughton's dignity was wonderful; it amused her husband immensely, he nearly laughed aloud. Anna guessed the truth, that 'my nurse' was a mythical personage, invented to preserve the dignity of the Broughtons generally.

Mattie was quite at her ease when baby was claiming attention. The return and reconciliation would have humiliated her for her own sake, and for Dick's, if it had not been for this important stranger to Maycross. His presence altered everything, making the drive to the Rectory a

kind of victorious celebration, a procession honouring to them all.

Dick kept on looking keenly at his sister; though he chattered constantly, playing with baby, teasing 'the youngster,' laughing, joking, his thoughts were serious. He wanted a chance to ask 'what's the matter, old girl?' to squeeze her hand.

'Morne's a brute,' he was thinking; 'I guess she found him out. If Nan knows that the fellow's a political black-leg she must be awfully wretched!'

They all entered the Rectory anxiously; Anna and Mattie side by side, the aunt holding young Philip. Into the rector's presence they went at once, forming a kind of body-guard before Dick, who came last, slowly, with no aid but that of

his stick. Mr. Broughton rose and came to meet them at the door of the library. He was trembling, unable to speak at once, but Mattie's courage rose.

'It's good of you to have us,' she said, 'for though I can't admit that it was wrong of me to love Dick, I know you think me a disgrace to the family. Don't let us think any more of the past, please don't, and . . . oh, you *must* smile or baby will scream at you!'

The necessity of the case made the rector's expression soften; he did smile, and put out a huge shaking finger for little Philip to grasp.

Dick came slowly forward and slipped his arm through his father's; he contrived to whisper something in the old man's ear, unheard by the listening women.

The Rector answered, brokenly,

'No, no, my boy, I'm an old fellow myself, you see.'

The baby laughed aloud, not understanding that his future was being provided for, a tragedy discussed which might concern him greatly.

The music of the little voice brought four souls into harmony.

That was a wonderful day. No wonder that Anna spared some grateful thoughts for Philip Hedworth, who had been Dick's friend throughout the past, who had taught her,—partly by counsel, but more by example,—to find in kinship and in friendship the hallowing sympathy which robs all disagreement of bitterness, and makes in simple lives great victories.

Dick's high spirits had increased as his bodily strength had lessened. The Rectory

rang with the sound of laughter and merry voices; the Rector was roused out of his sober dulness.

His plan was being put in practice early, his vision was already fulfilled.

Not until the evening did Anna remember the letter for her father which was in her pocket.

She handed it to him across Mattie's shoulder:—they were all sitting grouped round the fire, baby on the fur hearth-rug.

The Rector frowned at the envelope, tore it open, read its contents.

An exclamation of annoyance broke from him; his face changed.

'Anything wrong, sir?' asked Dick.

'Father!' cried Anna, rising in alarm.

Mattie, the stranger in the family, looked up, but said nothing.

To the surprise of them all, the old man recovered from his shock, and laughed, as a person does who has been deluded into some fear and awakes to the knowledge that he has been imposed upon.

'By Jove, sir, you looked so vexed you quite frightened us, didn't he, Nan?'

'What is it, father?'

He held the letter out to her.

'Read it aloud, my poor child:—there must be no secrets in the family, there are no outsiders here.'

It was from Purvis.

'Dad's writing!' cried Mattie, colouring.

Anna read. Once she stopped as though she could not bear to go on, but the rector repeated, 'There are no outsiders here.'

The letter had been timed for perusal that afternoon.

It was abrupt.

'To the Parson,

'My paper to-night will contain important news, the Government's intention with regard to the Eastern crisis will be announced. Mr. Morne supplied the information to his relative, Reuben Drive, for business purposes, and a clerk of Mr. Drive's has sold the information to me. I am in a position to *prove* Morne's treachery to his party. Now, I don't want to disgrace him. If you will receive my girl as your daughter, give her the position she ought to have as your only son's wife, and make her boy your heir, I will keep Morne's secret. If he is warned, he may give up his tricks, and escape the consequences of those past. Mrs. Morne could see to that. On the other hand, if you refuse my reasonable terms, I shall expose him. I've long wanted the power to force

you to do your duty to my girl. She knows nothing of this, neither does Dick. This evening, at eight o'clock sharp, I shall call for my answer.

'E. PURVIS.'

'Thank God, the threat comes too late!' Dick cried. 'Nan, old girl, don't take on about it. The pater has spoiled Purvis's revenge.'

Mattie, sobbing, threw herself into Anna's arms, kissing and fondling the elder woman's pale, rigid face.

'Oh, I love you . . . I love you . . . and my dad's been trying to harm you! . . . I'd die sooner than let your misery come through me, you know that, oh, say you know it . . . As Dick says, the threat's come too late to do harm, and I believe *you* made it so . . . you persuaded

the Rector to bear with me! . . . My dad will keep his word . . . and you can warn your husband . . . Oh, the danger is escaped . . . don't, don't hate baby because his name was used! . . .'

When Purvis came punctual to his time, a few minutes later, it was Anna who met him in the hall and led the way to the library.

He anticipated success for his scheme, but was impressed against his will by the quiet dignity of the woman whose peace he had threatened. He had threatened her, through her husband, because only in that way could he strike at 'the Parson.'

As he followed her across the corridor he felt an odd kind of pity for her.

To his inquiry for her father Anna had not spoken a word. She did not speak

now, but threw open the door. It was the Rector, within the room, who spoke.

'This is your answer,' he said.

His arm was in his son's, Mattie leaned against his shoulder, the baby was laughing and crowing on the rug, in the glow of the red firelight.

CHAPTER XIV.

Five hours later the same evening, Mrs. Morne entered her husband's house. There was no flurry or nervousness about her, she behaved calmly, as though her coming there at that late hour was the most natural occurrence possible. The servant, who knew it was strange, showed no surprise.

'Is your master in the drawing-room, Belton?' she asked.

'No, madam, master is alone in the dining-room.'

'I will go to him there,' she answered.

Coming out of the darkness into the brightly-lighted house her eyes were dazzled; she saw nothing very clearly, but she made out that Basil was seated before the table where the meal was spread; his hands were grasping a letter, the paper rustling under the touch; there was on his face the look of a gambler who has played with his last stake,—and lost.

She went forward, and touched his arm. There was a little silence, while their eyes met. He was wondering whether she had come to reproach him; she could not speak because of the fulness of her heart.

Next moment she had kissed him, wrapping her arms about him, falling on her knees that she might sob out her mingled joy, wretchedness, pardon, and prayers, upon his shoulder.

'Nan! . . .' he cried. . . 'Nan! . . .'

Then after a while,

'Nan, you said you'd come back to me when I was ruined and disgraced, but . . . I didn't believe you . . . Illworth has dismissed me . . . another secret's leaked out somehow, and I'm suspected.'

'Only *suspected*?' she asked, gazing up at him. '*I know*, but . . . no one else need . . . Lord Illworth is so kind . . . he will find you some other post.'

'He offers me one, abroad, a spot where I shall have no chances, nothing but hard work. Oh, Nan, you don't know what a man's ambition is! . . .'

'I know what it has claimed from you. Oh, Basil, my beloved, we will go abroad together, you shall begin again,—we both will begin again,—on new lines, you and I.'

'So you haven't deserted me?'

'We agreed to be helpmates, but when trouble came I forgot my promise—I won't fail you any more. And you . . . you will be honest, for my sake?'

The man was roused by her tenderness. Something of the strength of his old love came back to him, as holding her from him he gazed into the fair face which sorrow had made sympathetic.

'You love me still, in spite of all.'

He stated the fact, not questioning its reality; yet she answered:

'Yes, husband . . . I shall always love you.'

'What has changed your idea of duty, Nan? It can't have been the Rector's persuasion, or any doings of Bab's.'

Anna, reading her own heart, learned

yet another lesson from her experience, and put it into words.

'It was Philip Hedworth's counsel, Basil. I believe many a woman must owe a great deal to the man who has truly loved her, but whom she has not loved.'

THE END.

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